

Walking Through Holy Week with Jesus
Sermon by Vicar Katherine Chatelaine-Samson
Palm Sunday 2017
Matthew 21:1 - 11

When I was growing up, my home church always had a kid-friendly Good Friday service. We'd walk around the churchyard and building and re-enact significant parts of Jesus' life and ministry. Members of the congregation dressed up in robes and sandals to play different characters in the stories being told, and those of us in the crowd took on the role of the crowd that followed Jesus. For example, at one station, some people would stand on scaffolding and lower down a man pretending to be a paralytic, whom the actor playing Jesus would heal. The now-healed man would get up and we'd follow him to the next station, which was Zacchaeus in the tree, and so on and so forth.

The entire procession culminated in the reenactment of scenes from Holy Week. Palm Sunday took place in the church parking lot with everyone waving palm branches and the actor playing Jesus riding in on a real donkey! Maundy Thursday was in the church basement, where we all ate some bread and washed one another's feet. We then moved outside for Jesus' arrest and trial, and then to the side yard of the church where the actor playing Jesus stood on a cross, surrounded by his disciples, Roman centurions, and all of us, playing the crowd of mourners.

As a kid, I absolutely loved this service because it brought Holy Week to life for me. Kids are concrete thinkers, so being able to literally walk through the stories of Jesus' life and ministry made them real. Even as an adult, I've enjoyed being able to participate in the drama of Holy Week, whether it's parading into a church and waving palm branches on Palm Sunday or following the cross through the streets of Georgetown in an annual service that brings the cross to the forgotten corners of this neighborhood. Again, these experiences bring Holy Week to life, providing a tangible, lived experience of walking in Jesus' footsteps.

When we walk in Jesus' footsteps, we learn how to walk the path of discipleship. And walking in his footsteps during Holy Week shows us, in acute form, what this path of discipleship looks like.

Discipleship makes me think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, not only because he wrote about discipleship, but also because he actually lived it. We listened to and discussed Bonhoeffer's words on Christian community in our Wednesday evening Lenten

studies, and we also learned about his extraordinary life. Bonhoeffer maintained a clear commitment to following Jesus on the path of discipleship. And this was not an easy path – it was one that led to unfulfilled dreams related to an academic career, becoming an outcast among his peers, maintaining an unpopular view of who and what the church was called to be in a time of extreme crisis. This path even led to his state-ordered execution in Flossenbürg concentration camp. In fact, today is the 72nd anniversary of his death.

Bonhoeffer didn't make up what discipleship looks like. He looked to Jesus as the prime example of how to live a God-filled life and Bonhoeffer followed him. Discipleship is not an effortless path, full of success and easy answers. It's a path that journeys with Jesus throughout Holy Week and bids us to take up our own crosses in his name.

But discipleship does not end at the cross. Discipleship also opens to us the road to a resurrected life, where death and all the powers that defy God's goodness and life have lost their hold on the world. Discipleship bids us to hold on to the vision of God's Kingdom, and to work with God to uncover its coming in our time and place through forgiveness, love of neighbor and enemy, healing brokenness, and all the other ministries to which Jesus call us.

Holy Week is a school for discipleship as we walk with Jesus day-by-day. As we participate in the drama of each day, we can learn how to walk this path with Jesus and can be attentive to how Jesus is calling us to be his disciples in this time and this place.

Shout those hosannas and sing out those psalms and hymns of praise today, and then take them with you out onto the street as you leave this space! On Thursday, eat fully of the meal of life that Jesus shared with his disciples and share this meal and the forgiveness it offers with others who need its nourishment. Weep with abandon as you nail your sins to the cross on Good Friday and repent of all you have done to wield that hammer. Wait with hopefulness on Saturday for the revelation of God's kingdom in our weary world and pray that we may all be a part of the new thing that God is about to and has already done for the world.

This Holy Week, walk the path of discipleship; learn from its teacher. Discover the new life that Jesus calls you to with his outstretched, embracing arms.

Thanks be to God, AMEN.