

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday – Year B
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- SERMON -

It always amazes me that each year on this day, Palm Sunday, we experience such a display of uncertainty and change. First, we have the people shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”

And then shortly after, we have the people shouting, “Crucify him!”

What happened?!

It seems the people were so FULL of their “expectations” of what their Messiah was SUPPOSED to be and do, that they didn’t have room for anything more. So, when he was not what they expected, they were easily swayed to disown him as their Messiah. In effect saying, “Let’s get rid of this guy, so we can go back to what we have ALWAYS BELIEVED God meant when he spoke of the one who would come, who was to “...bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners.”

They were protecting what they knew (or thought they knew). And when you are protecting the old, what’s new looks like a threat.

As we went through Lent this year, we were encouraged to spend time acknowledging that we are sinners, confessing our sin to Almighty God, emptying ourselves of the guilt of our sin, and receiving His forgiveness. We emptied ourselves of ourselves, so that we could focus on others. We emptied ourselves of whatever it was we chose to fast from, to allow room for something good, wholesome, positive.

And now. Now. We are about to go through a week in which all of this culminates with a NEW plan.

The phrase for you this morning is “Make Room for the New!”

Some of you may have never attended a Maundy Thursday service, never experienced it. It is usually a time to remember how Jesus served his disciples by washing their feet, and of when they shared his last supper together (the Passover meal). But the most meaningful part of Maundy Thursday for ME is at the end how we “make room” for the new. The cushions around the altar are moved out, the candles, crosses, everything loose around the altar area and throughout the sanctuary is taken away. The linens are removed from the altar, the bare altar is cleaned, and at the last, the eternal lamp, which represents the presence of Christ, is snuffed out.

(Pause)

On Good Friday we remember his crucifixion.

And then a time to experience the emptiness. The disciples must have felt so desolate and empty after his crucifixion and his body is laid to rest.

Then, on Saturday's Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday, something new takes place. Resurrection. New life.

And perhaps something new in your life. This is a time to allow yourself to receive something new. Sometimes it's difficult to receive something new in our lives, though, when we hang on to old mindsets. As we have emptied ourselves and humbled ourselves, ask God what new thing he wants to do in your life. It might be something you would never have considered doing. And most likely that's exactly what it will be, because it will be Him doing it, and not you, yourself.

It might be with people you don't even like. It might be something you feel is 'beneath you', or maybe something you feel is WAY out of your range. There's a phrase you may have heard that says, "If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it." Don't limit what God can do through you. Don't limit yourself. What has happened in your past has brought you to this point in time, brought you through the experiences and understanding that you didn't have before, brought you to THIS point where you can receive something new in your life.

The Israelites didn't understand why this Jesus acted the way he did. The group he formed and disciples were not trained for battle against the Romans to bring them freedom from Roman control, but were rather taught the way of love, gentleness, yet with the ability to take a stand for their faith. He didn't live to be another king of Israel, but the KING of Kings and Lord of Lords.

We read this morning that Christ Jesus emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave and humbling himself he became obedient to the point of death. And because he did this, putting God first in all things, God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord..."

This didn't register from their previous understanding. This was too much of a difference, and they couldn't accept it.

(Pause)

This last year, almost every time I get up here to give a sermon, I seem to repeatedly acknowledge that the past year has been a hard one for us. And it has been. But I do that because whatever I'm saying this year MUST acknowledge where we are today. This same message two years ago would be received with a different mindset than it will be today. This last year we've lost friends and loved ones. Because of the need for social distancing, we've

almost forgotten how to hug. Two years ago, how often did we even use the phrase “social distancing”? Change is difficult.

Is there something old in our lives we’re hanging on to that needs to be moved out of the way to make room for something new? Anger, bitterness, regret, old habits that might prevent our love for others from showing through?

If you think about it, we might use the example of trying to pick something up with our hand when we’re already holding a baseball. It’s not easy, is it?

I’m going to do something different today. We’ve come through Lent and yet there may be something you are still holding onto that you know needs to be confessed, or repented of, and in your heart you know it’s keeping you from receiving something new from God. I would ask that for just a minute right now while you sit in your place (or at least when you get home and in private) you simply hold your hands in front of you, palms up, and mentally place those things in your hands (you know what they are) and give them to God. When I have done this, I’ll lift my hands up, giving these offerings of confession and repentance to God. We know he forgives; we know He receives your offerings. For His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. ...

Thank you. You can put your hands down.

So, we make room for the new. Room for whatever it is that God wants to show you, to resurrect in your life, a new ministry, a new relationship, perhaps simply to have peace - which is something you haven’t had in a while.

I might also say, a new pastor, as Rev. Whitney Burton makes arrangements for something new in HER life, to be a part of Good Shepherd in a few weeks. May we be an example for her to see how God has worked in this parish and in this community.

As we go through this Holy Week, we can know that the next time we speak of being empty, it will be of the empty tomb of Christ. The result of His resurrection to NEW life. And may we ever shout, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Amen.