

Palm Sunday A 2017

Matthew 21:1-11
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 27:11-66

Our faith is a story,
Not a theory.

There is no Christianity
Separate from the events we mark today.

The truth we claim is this:
The source of all life,
The love that makes the world,
willingly and completely intertwines
the fullness of the divine self
With the daily, touchable matter
Of life here and now.
This truth is expressed today
In a story of waving palms and shouting crowds,
Of fear and blood,
Spitting and striking,
And death.

If you want to see God present and active in the world,
Look at this story.

Our faith is founded on the claim
That these things happened in real time,
To an actual human being,
A young man made,
As are we all,
Not only by God,
And for God,
But, as one of our mystical mothers understood,
made of God.
All human beings are made of God,
And Jesus is one of us.

He is what we are becoming,
The glory of God,
Realized in a human being, fully alive.
The glory of God,
Says the early church father,
The glory of God is a human being, fully alive.

Fully alive, and willing to die.
Willing to die,
But fearful, and in agony,
And at the end, abandoned.

Our faith is a story
That confronts the bitterness of life
And the terror of death.

Today we mark this story,
The events of long ago and far away,
And we recognize that they are more than a symbol,
More than a sign.
They happened in one particular time and place.
And they are true in all times and places.

These events happened
not in one of the vanished cities of long ago,
Samarkand or Tashkent,
Or in one of the vanishing cities of today –
Aleppo –
But in a city still thriving,
After countless generations,
A city still teeming with conflict and life,
Still divided by factions and oppression –
Jerusalem the golden.

If you go to Jerusalem,
You can climb the Mount of Olives,
As Jesus did with his friends,
And from there walk down a steep slope
to the garden of Gethsemane,
And, if you choose, go through the Kidron Valley
And back up out of the rocky valley
to enter the old city by a gate.
You can walk in the footsteps of Jesus,
Stop and weep where he wept over Jerusalem,
Watch where he asked his friends to watch with him,
Touch the ancient rocks that witnessed his coming,
Stop in the shade of the olive trees
That have sprung from the roots of the olive trees he saw.

This matters.
It is of the essence that these things happened in a real place,
At a certain time,
To a real person

Who breathed the same air we breathe
And ate the bread we eat
And died the death we die.

This matters.
And as essential that it is that the stones remain,
And the trees still grow in the garden,
And the gates of the city still receive pilgrims
And worshippers,
We do not need to go there
To make the story our story.

When we walk the walk here,
When we tell the story here,
We participate as truly as and deeply
As those who were there.
We enter not only in imagination,
But we enter as the community of faith.
The story happens here now.

I had heard this,
And I was not sure it was true,
Until I made the journey last summer,
And walked from the Mount of Olives
Down to the garden,
And then walked through the gate of the city.

Now I know that as important as it is,
As great a privilege as it is,
To walk where Jesus walked
And to touch the stones,
The story lives as deeply here
As it does there.

These things happened once,
In time,
And now we mark them always and everywhere.

What we do today is remember,
Commemorate.
Mark.
Today we enter the story,
And signal our intention
To stay with the story to the end,
And beyond the end
To the beginning.

What we do today is remember.
In the week to come,
There is more.
This is a commemoration.

What is coming on Maundy Thursday is a sacrament,
An inbreaking of the holy
That will join time to eternity
And earth to heaven.
What is coming on Good Friday is a cataclysm,
An event of immeasurable power and meaning
That tears asunder the veil between life and death,
Earth and heaven,
Time and eternity.

In the great three days that are coming,
We celebrate the events that happened once in time
And now live in eternity,
The moments that have become thin places
Where the sacred comes to dwell
In the stuff of life.

In the great three days that are coming,
A single meal becomes the great feast.
And death becomes the turning point of life.

These moments of eucharist, crucifixion,
and finally, resurrection
Are in and out of time,
In and out of what we think of as the real world.

But the story we tell today
is the story that happens in time and place.
The story that begins,
Not at the beginning,
But near the end,
And ends at the end which is not the end,
But the beginning.

But the beginning is not yet.
Our faith is a story,
And if it is to be our faith,
Really and truly ours,
Then we have to live the story,
Step by step,

Hour by hour.

We can do that any place,
And at any time.
But we are time-bound,
And this moment of Palm Sunday has been given to us
As a chance to step onto the road,
And follow in the way.

Why do we do these things?
Because it matters.
We do not have to go to the place,
But we have to live the story in our bodies,
Because though we are made of God,
We are made of flesh and blood,
And that is how we experience the world.

Our faith is not a theory.
It is a story that happens in the real world,
Then and now.
There and here and everywhere.
We experience the meaning as we participate,
With palms in our hands,
With water poured on our feet,
With bread and wine in our mouths,
With a cross set in our midst.
With a stone rolled across the entrance to the tomb.

And beyond that,
A new beginning.
But not yet.
For now, we walk the walk.

· Julian of Norwich
· Irenaus