

A Deeper Experience of Holy Week

Homily delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019

In the name of one God, creator, redeemer and sustainer. Amen.

One of the things I appreciate most about our reading of the Passion Narrative on Palm Sunday is that it is done as a communal event.

Unlike the solo presentation I made at the early service this morning and the version I will read from John's Gospel later this week during our Good Friday service, a communal reading of the narrative allows us to hear many voices. A communal reading draws different ways of sharing ... different vocal inflections ... different emotions. A communal reading might even prompt a new way for us to consider a particular word or phrase.

But above all, it is a **participatory** event. We are not simply **reading** the words; we are **experiencing** them. We are not just **hearing** the story; we are **seeing** and **feeling** it.

The liturgies making up the arc of Holy Week carry us on an incredible journey through the last days of the pre-resurrection life of Christ. Beginning this morning and continuing through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday until we at last arrive at Easter morning, we are granted opportunities to live the narrative journey in a new way. We are not simply **reading** and **hearing** about Jesus and the disciples and those moving around them, but **seeing what they see ... feeling what they feel ... sharing in their experiences ... their sorrows ... their joys**.

Our service this morning could be considered the first page of this liturgical chapter of the church year. None of what takes place over the next several days makes sense or can exist without this morning ... and neither can there be any real meaning to today without turning to the next pages over the remainder of the week. In order to get a full appreciation of this week ... to receive the full impact of what happens ... I invite you to attend all of the services. More than that, on an even deeper level than we achieve in a communal reading of Scripture, I invite you to **experience** these services. Do not simply listen to or read the Gospel passages that span the next seven days; **dive into them ... ponder them deeply ... pray over them**. In fact, take some time to try place yourselves in each scene.

In the early-16th century, Saint Ignatius of Loyola wrote a famous set of spiritual exercises and contemplative practices that includes examples of this very type of thing. Completing the full set of exercises requires a 30-day retreat led by a trained retreat leader, but even apart from that it can be interesting to read through the text of some of them and see what they entail. In several of the exercises, participants are guided through a process of fully exploring a particular scene: imagining what a room may look like or how it is furnished; describing what they see people wearing; reflecting on the words that are being spoken. There are opportunities for

reflection on the personal impact of this examination and consideration of what God might be trying to say to them how God might be trying to influence their lives.

This is naturally a very simplified version of the exercises. But the basic premise is one I invite you to use this week as you pray and reflect on the readings, the liturgies and your own lives. Ask yourselves a few questions as you do so: What are you seeing? What are you hearing? What have you brought from the previous liturgy, and what will you carry to the next? And how do you perceive God may be speaking to you or guiding you?

As you do, as you walk the journey of Holy Week, I pray that perhaps you will experience these services, these readings ... and indeed, the entire season ... in a new and deeper way.

Amen.