

PALM SUNDAY

Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!’ Mark 11:9

If we followed the lectionary this morning, we would have heard this short Gospel during the Blessing of the Palms. And then in the main liturgy we would have read the entire Passion Gospel of Mark – producing what I have always felt to be a schizophrenic liturgy: one that lurches from Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem right through his arrest, trial, crucifixion, and death.

I’m not sure what the experts were thinking when they combined these two stories. After all, we are just beginning Holy Week. Plenty is yet to happen to Jesus and his disciples before the Passion Story – the Last Supper, to name one major event. I don’t know, but I’m guessing that the lectionary for Palm/Passion Sunday was crafted when most Christians – or most non-Roman Catholics, in any event– attended church only on Sunday. Those folks would never hear the Passion story if they didn’t go to a Good Friday Service. They’d go straight from the loud and joyful procession to the Resurrection – and thereby miss the meaning of the Resurrection altogether.

But since I encourage everyone to participate as often and fully as possible in the services of Holy Week, in order to experience the full and rich joy of the Resurrection, we reserve the Passion Gospel for Good Friday. And indeed, there’s plenty to dwell on in the account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. The story is a major turning point in Mark’s Gospel. Jerusalem and its environs occupy center stage for the remainder of the narrative, and Jesus’ presentation of himself enters a new dimension.

Jesus begins to make predictions about concrete events that will occur immediately: the finding of the colt and the response when the disciples take it. Until now, his predictions have been abstract and theological – or, at least, incomprehensible to those who hear them: his death and the return of the Son of Man, for example. His forecasting of literal events proves accurate; so perhaps his more mystifying and terrifying prophecies will prove accurate as well. The stakes are rising now, inexorably.

And Jesus continues to escalate his *coming out*. He enters the civic arena with fanfare, quite contrary to his former pattern of commanding silence following his miracles. He announces a new identity for himself: he is, indeed, the Messiah, though not the One his people are expecting. He goes public.

Two weeks ago, Bishop Gene Robinson lectured at Trinity, Copley Square. Here's a bit of what he said. "There are a couple of great stories about gay people in the Bible. Maybe you didn't know that. One of them is the Exodus story, which is the greatest coming out story in the history of the world. It is, don't laugh. Because we know what it's like to be in slavery. We know what it's like to be in bondage. We know what it's like not to be free. Because we've had the experience of someone coming and talking about a promised land, not just of milk and honey, but of freedom, and God's love and acceptance, and some of us actually believed it and left. We left Egypt to come out."

Gay or not, we all have had the experience of *coming out* in one way or another. Coming out as in recovery from an addiction. Coming out as divorced, or a single parent, or a victim of abuse, or unemployed. We all know the emotions that accompany coming out: vulnerability, apprehension, anxiety, fear, shame – and also, hope, also liberation, also, freedom.

And I imagine Jesus encountered all those same feelings during his short ride on the hijacked colt. *Vulnerability* – he's exposed to an unruly crowd with unrealistic, inflated expectations. *Apprehension and anxiety* – he knows that this enthusiastic reception will not last. He's entering Jerusalem under what soon will be interpreted as false pretenses. He will disappoint everyone who believes that he's come bringing immediate change to the world, that the incoming of justice and peace are imminent. *Fear* – he knows he will be betrayed and crucified, in the end, just as all of us who make ourselves vulnerable to others will find ourselves betrayed and wounded in small, and sometimes large, ways.

But also, *coming out* brings with it sensations of liberation, freedom, and hope. Now we become more fully ourselves. We free ourselves of the secrets we have been guarding so vigilantly – and that vigilance is exhausting, isn't it? We discover, or rediscover, our core identity, our core integrity – we reacquaint ourselves with the people we are meant to be, the people God means us to be. And we dare to hope that we, and the world around us, can indeed be healed, can become more peaceful, more just, and more whole. Paradoxically, miraculously, out of our vulnerability emerges new strength, new trust, new vision.

Mark's Gospel is noted for what Biblical scholars call "the messianic secret." Mark, more than any other Gospelist, portrays Jesus as guarding his special identity closely. Who is this Jesus? What is his mission? Mark's Jesus is tight-lipped about this, for the most part, and his disciples are befuddled.

But now, the secret is out. Of course, it's the wrong secret, or the right secret, wrongly understood. As so many of our secrets, when exposed to the light of day, can be misinterpreted and used against us. Our secrets can become weapons in the hands of those who wish us ill, and also, ironically, can become weapons for those who invest too much in us and are disappointed.

All that will happen to Jesus in the coming week. He will be betrayed by those who love him and whom he has trusted: his disciples. He will be killed by those whom he threatens, his long-time adversaries. That is all to come.

But for the moment, Jesus rides into Jerusalem, the sacred city of his ancestors, the city of his destiny. He rides tall and free, the person he is meant to be, God's beloved. He rides to change the world forever, and he will. Hosanna in the highest!

Amen