

PALM SUNDAY

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.' Matthew 21:11

Today we march out of Lent. We have marched with noise and music around the block: a symbol recognition that that's where we belong, out in the world, bearing witness to the redeeming love of God in the midst of ugliness, tragedy, and chaos.

So we march *out* of the subdued, contemplative, inward time of penitence, we march *out* of Lent. And we march *toward* the joy of the Resurrection.

But first, we have to go through the fearsome fire of Holy Week. We must walk together through the week that reminds us, year in and year out, how the world, and we with it, try to kill God. Because God is too radical, too threatening, to be endured in and by the world.

Jesus knew his triumphant moment would be short-lived. He has warned his disciples over and over again that he's on his own march toward ignominious and excruciating death. They don't want to believe him. They don't know how to believe him. But he knows.

Imagine how ironic this parade into Jerusalem, the center of all Jewish faith and practice, must seem to him. Here, where his Father-God is most worshipped and honored, here he will die.

And imagine how lonely he must be with that knowledge of his destiny.

Joan Hamilton told me a story last week about her niece, whose father is a Presbyterian minister. She said the little girl came home from church school on Palm Sunday and told her father what she had learned.

"Daddy," she said, "Jesus got very sad. But then he changed his name to Paul, and got very happy. That's why we call this *Paul Sunday*." But then, Joan reported, the girl became downcast. "But some people call it *Palm Sunday*, she said.

Well, we are those people. We call it *Palm* Sunday, and we celebrate. We celebrate despite knowing what's coming: betrayal, arrest, trial, another trial, conviction, another betrayal, humiliation, pain, death.

We celebrate because we know and believe what the crowd shouted on the road to Jerusalem, '*Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of God. This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.*' They didn't understand what they were saying, what was the meaning of the titles they gave Jesus. But we do. And we celebrate.

And we celebrate because in a few moments now we will welcome Charlie James Gallagher into the Body of Christ through the sacrament of Baptism. What an added joy on this already exciting day!

And what a fitting day on which to renew our own Baptismal Covenant, and to remind ourselves what we have pledged as followers of Jesus. We have promised to join together and support one another as we all *do* follow Jesus, follow him not only through prayer and praise on Sunday morning but out into the world, into the turmoil, the confusion, the evil—the many challenges that, along with the many joys await us in our daily lives.

And we pledge today to join with Charlie on that journey, as he begins his travels along the road of life, following Jesus, to support and guide him as he learns to *persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever he falls into sin, repent and return to God, to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, to seek & serve Christ in all persons, loving his neighbor as himself, and to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.*

And today we remind ourselves of how, as I said at the beginning, how we try to kill God. Kill God through selfishness, or cruelty, or unfairness or just plain neglect. Life would be so much simpler, we must think at times, without God to challenge and change us. But our God refuses to die.

Our baptism doesn't promise that life will be easy, or full of moments of triumph like Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. Our baptism does promise that

as we are buried with Christ in death, so also we share in Christ's resurrection.

Today we begin our annual walk together, in faith, through the valley of the shadow with Jesus. We enter the fearsome fire of Holy Week: betrayal, arrest, trial, another trial, conviction, another betrayal, humiliation, pain, death. But we know and remember that, in the end, God refuses to die.

And so, we celebrate.

Amen