

SERMON - PALM SUNDAY – 16 MARCH 2008
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

We have come this morning, figuratively joined with the crowds to welcome Jesus; to welcome Jesus as he enters Jerusalem, in triumph; Our voices ringing with joy as we cry out, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosannah in the highest!

We have also, this morning, joined in with the crowd who cried out for him to be crucified; Our voices ringing with, "Crucify him! Crucify him!

This week we will journey with Jesus, in triumph and in agony. We will sleep as He prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. We will bluster and draw our swords as He is arrested. We will draw back into the crowds so we won't be recognized as one of His followers. We will deny Him.

We will drive the nails into His flesh.

We will let Him die on the cross.

This week, we will journey with Jesus, as we always do, like every other week in our lives. For life is a journey, for better or for worse. This week, however, we are specially reminded of that journey. More focused, or we should be more focused, on our journey with Jesus, with God.

This morning, let us journey with Jesus as he takes the last path of His mortal life, from the Praetorium, along the Via Dolorosa, to Golgotha.

Let us join our journey with His as He makes His way to the Cross, and let us reflect together how our journeys conform to His.

Or, in other words, do we really journey with Jesus.

Have we really died to the world? Have we really turned over our lives to Jesus, to God? Or have we, like Ananius and Saphira, held a little back, just in case. Just in case that God doesn't take care of us in the way we want, not in the way we need.

As we begin our journey today with Jesus, as we join in the crowd that is following Him as He is led away from His trial, is it curiosity that has us here? Is it the excitement? After all, we deserve to be entertained. Do we even care that Jesus is condemned, not for His sins, but for ours.

Our journey, our journey with Jesus, requires that we each pick up our cross. Jesus, himself, said so. You know the command, "If anyone...." And those crosses are heavy. And it is tempting to put down, or hide it in a closet, and walk away. How much easier life would be if we didn't have to drag that darn thing along with us.

But, my brothers and sisters, if we didn't have that cross, we would, because we are human, find something else to drag along. We would find some other baggage to burden ourselves down with.

Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus' cross. Did we take up our cross because we are scared to die and are using that as a bargaining point? Or, in other words, are we dragging it along as a burden so God will give us eternal life? God! I will worship you if you will... blah... blah... blah.

St. Veronica felt love and compassion toward Jesus and, risking her life, went and ministered to Him. She could have been killed for doing that. She risked all for Him. Are we really willing, ourselves, to put it on the line, to risk everything including our own lives for God? Are we really ready to put our entire being in hands of God? But that is what Jesus is saying when He tells us to pick up our cross and follow Him.

We watch as Jesus falls, three times, on His way to the Cross. But each time, He gets up and proceeds on His way. Spiritual maturity, I am told, is the ability to pick yourself up after you fall, or fail, truly ask God's forgiveness, and go ahead.

The number of times we fall is not important, to ourselves, or to God. It's the getting up that is. The writer of The Cloud of Unknowing put it so well, "It is not what you are nor what you have been that God looks at with His merciful eyes, but what you desire to be."

We watch as Jesus encounters first His mother then later the women of Jerusalem. There are those times when, no matter what situation we are in, no matter when we are hurting physically or emotionally, or maybe both, that we are called upon to minister. I'm saying minister in the true sense, to help someone in the spirit of sacrificial love.

We are now at the end of our journey with Jesus today. We stand back, in the crowd, in watch as He is stripped naked, cruelly nailed to the Cross, alone except for a pitifully few followers, and left to die.

Are we ready, as we say euphemistically, to meet our maker? Are we ready to come before God, stripped of our masks and pretenses... Alone... Totally responsible for what sins we have committed that we have not turned over to God, what acts that we have not had erased.

Jesus died to save us from eternal death, but we still are going to have to answer for those same petty, tacky, sins we just seem to hold onto.

Finally, He is taken down from the Cross and laid in the tomb. It is all over now.

But for Jesus, it is not all over. There is still the Resurrection.

Will we be there also?