

Palm Sunday 2019  
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI  
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The other night, I drove across the Hoan Bridge from my house in Bayview north toward the church. Above me was a clear night sky, with the sun setting off to my left in reds, pinks, and purples. In front of me, though, was a dark, black bank of clouds drawing a stark line across the Milwaukee skyline. I remember thinking I wished I was a photographer because I had seldom seen a more striking division in the sky. On one side of the bridge was a balmy near-summer evening. But in front of me was an infinity of black, roiling clouds interspersed with flashes of lightning. A plane was flying north, and I wondered what it must have been like to be the people looking out the window — moving from a clear blue summer sky into a spring turbulence. What is it like to live on the electric edge of something as big as a storm?

I'm guessing it's how we feel right now, in the very middle of today's liturgy — caught between the two halves of the Jesus' story.

Is this Palm Sunday, with its triumphant entrance into Jerusalem? Or is this Passion Sunday, the day on which our Lord was humiliated and killed?

We enter Jerusalem in triumph with Jesus. We, the beloved community, shout Hosanna to the King of David because we know he has come into the city to change everything. We are living in solidarity and praise with our Messiah.

And then everything does change, but it seems the government and the crowds don't want the change that Jesus is looking to bring. And so they strip, humiliate, and kill him. Our teacher, our friend, and our God.

How can one human heart bear the shift from triumph to humiliation? It seems like it is too much.

Bearing witness is real work. It's Christian work. And this morning, we are bearing witness to the extremes of the human condition — from "hosanna" to "into your hands I commend my spirit."

That tension, the in-betweenness, is going to sink into your bones a bit today. It's going to be jarring. Sit with it. Violence is jarring. The human capacity for evil is jarring. Seeing a mirror of ourselves in the crowd is jarring.

But we know something that those poor people in Jerusalem didn't know. We know that we are in the middle of the story, not at the end. The church doesn't want to move us too quickly from the storm to the clear sky — we're going to live in this difficult tension this whole week. Let the discord of our observance move you closer to God and closer to your neighbor.

Jesus really did triumph. And Jesus really did die. Those things are both true at the same time. This week, we will find out what that means for us, for the church, and for the world. Don't move too quickly to Easter. The storm has something to teach us. Amen.