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St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday
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“Hosanna!?”

Today is perhaps the most puzzling day in our Church calendar. At one point we stand in awe and praise at the coming of the Messiah. We reenact those moments of cheer as did the crowd who saw Jesus enter into the city. They were so certain that this Man was the one. They were so sure that Jesus the Nazorean was the Messiah hoped for. He was the one to free them from their oppressors and he would be the one to restore Israel to its former glory. They spread out their cloaks upon the road and branches too, according to Mark. *“Hosanna!”* they shouted, *“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”* Their story is our story for we began our liturgy in much the same way.

Yet, now there is a different tenor, a different mood cast upon us. The thrill and exaltation of the day is gone. The hope in Jesus has fizzled and died. Didn't his riding into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt give them a clue? A colt that wasn't even his in the first place? The fact that there was no military army riding beside him to protect him? No secret service? Religious leaders had plotted against him. His friends abandoned him and one among them had betrayed him. Yet another denied him. And now, Jesus is dead and his body placed in a cold and dark tomb. Those cheers much earlier had turned into jeers. “Crucify him!” they and we said. “Crucify him!”

Would we have done anything different if we had physically been there amongst the crowd? Counted among his followers? Would we have shouted “Hosanna!” and then a few days later “Crucify him?” We would like to think that we would have behaved differently. We would have understood the meaning of his coming and the stories he told. We would have understood why he welcomed and embraced all manner of people and not sent any away to fend for themselves. We would have gotten it-the message that we were to be like him. We would have rallied around him and cried for mercy and not run away. We would have helped him carry his cross and stood right there at the foot of the cross to comfort him until he breathed his last.

But would we have done anything different than the crowds? Maybe not. The people wanted justice. They wanted freedom from oppression. And the religious leaders, they were not so keen on giving up their power and authority. They would have become like any other Joe on the streets. They had gained too much only to have so little really. Yet we know that Jesus' idea of freedom was not the same as the crowds nor was his idea of power.

Until the end, Jesus had one mission in mind-to show us the extravagant love of God. Love so enormous that he was willing to give of his life, to pour it out, for the world on the hard wood of the cross.

Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, offers this powerful reflection:

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death--
even death on a cross.*

This day is mysterious as we experience both the highs and the lows of it all, as we try to make sense of it all. But maybe today the best we might do is to embrace and truly give thanks for what has been done for us and for the world.

I encourage us to come sit at the foot of the cross at some point during this week deemed holy. Before Easter flowers are delivered and white hangings are hung. To remember what love looked like and looks like even now. For the outpouring of God's loves continues.

The story is not over.

To be continued...