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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday, Year C
April 14, 2019
Luke 19:28-40

Does there exist a word or phrase that best fits this day? What have we heard? Witnessed? Celebration or defeat? Tragedy or triumphant? A parade or a funeral procession?

Biblical scholars say that there were two marches that day. The Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, rode through the front door of the city of Jerusalem in all of his military might. No doubt there would have been fine horses, carriages, flags and banners waving in the wind, and horns blaring announcing his arrival. Rome's troops, hundreds of them, no thousands of them, dressed in their military finest-helmets, shields, and swords polished to the nth degree. Like today's secret service there may have been archers placed strategically on roof tops or guards hidden in out of the way passages or cloaked in plain sight, the best of the best keeping a keen lookout for groups or individuals who would dare interrupt the occasion. Of course, people living in or near Jerusalem and the thousand upon thousand pilgrims coming in for Passover would have known better than to test the militia on this day. Or any day for that matter. Enough of them knew the stories and they would have seen what terrible things happened to those who dared defy Rome.

On the other side of town another march is beginning. Jesus has thought about it for a while. And like the leading man in a James Bond or Mission Impossible movie, he has plotted his course and had people and things in place. He would need the colt of a donkey and sends disciples ahead to secure it. He would do the same for the place where he and his friends would have their last meal.

Seated on the colt Jesus made his way through an archway. What a difference in presentation! Here is the people's king, some thought, though he never wanted the title, arriving on the back of a baby donkey. He certainly does not look the part. He has no army like Pilate's. There are no spears or swords or shields. No banners, plumes or palms in this account, only cloaks spread out on the dusty road. Did anyone even know he was coming? Did the multitude even know who he was? No matter, his disciples make enough of a ruckus. *"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"*

Yes, even in the midst of the people's oppression there is still hope in the promise God made to God's people of the One who would come to deliver them from their enemies. Was it the man seated on the donkey? Was it him? Was freedom coming now, this day?

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The folks who yelled "hosanna" and "blessed is the king" soon changed their tune when Roman blood did not spill into the streets. Many of them later shouted out, "Crucify, crucify him!"

We have arrived at the week deemed "holy." Jesus has made it to Jerusalem. There are no more side visits or parties or miracles on the way to the place they called the Skull.

We remember. The last meal and the washing of feet. The agony in the garden, denials, trumped up charges, and the cross.

"...though he was in the form of God, (he) 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."

We remember it all.

Celebration or defeat? Tragedy or triumphant? A parade or a funeral procession?

Sisters and brothers, you are invited to walk at Jesus' side and continue the journey with through Holy Week.

Must Jesus bear the cross alone? Must he?