

The Rev. Erin Hensley
Palm Sunday Year B
Mark 11:9-11; Mark 15:11-14
April 1, 2012

Will We Follow?

“If we really knew how much God loves us, it would kill us.”¹ To truly receive the depth and breadth of God’s love one cannot escape the reality of death. Not death in the physical sense or even death in the sense of occasional illness or suffering, but the death of one’s false, old self. Such death is inevitable when we face the decisive revelation of God in Jesus who gave himself daily for God’s world, even to the point of death on the cross.

On Palm Sunday we remember how quickly and easily we move from following the Lord of Love to crucifying him. If we’re honest with ourselves, this is really no surprise. Rowan Williams makes this plain when he says, “we have only to pause and recall the ways in which we find goodness unsettling, suspect—even the relief we feel if an exemplary person turns out not to be quite so good after all. Faced with real goodness, our instinct is to run for cover.”² We are indeed so fearful of following Jesus all the way into Jerusalem. We are so afraid to face the domination systems that uplift a few at the expense of many. We are so terrified of dying that we want Jesus to die.

In the first century, the Roman establishment used the cross to crucify those who went against the imperial authority. The Pax Romana or the Roman Peace came through victory based on battle, bloodshed, and oppression. To be crucified on a cross was to be killed for going against this supposedly divine kingdom. The cross in Jesus’ time pointed to another kind of death, death of one’s old life to new life. No mere small changes, but a radical reorientation of one’s priorities. The way of Jesus is the way of the cross. The way of the cross goes *through* not around Jerusalem, *through* not around the powers that destroy God’s people and God’s world, *through* not around death.

We do not live under the rule of the Roman Empire, but we do live in equally destructive times. And when we die to our false selves we see the powers that tear down versus build up that of God. Virtual lives at the cost of human relationship. Competition at the cost of childhood. Instant gratification at the cost of human dignity. Profit at the cost of the working and extreme

¹ Quote from Carolyn Edge, my spiritual director for whom I give God great thanks.

² Williams, Rowan. *Tokens of Trust*, page 84.

poor. Convenience at the cost of God's creation. You see, the worldly way of peace is still through victory in battle.

The Godly way of peace is victory through sacrifice. The Godly way of peace is victory through a radical letting go of our own way. The most radical sacrifice has already been given in Jesus' willingness to die on the cross. In Jesus Christ, God has held absolutely *nothing* back and this changes *everything*. In Jesus Christ, we are already saved from ourselves. We are already saved from the powers of death and destruction. In Jesus Christ, we have the potential to stop crucifying that of God in this world.

The way to such new life is the way of the cross, the way through Jerusalem, the way of confronting domination based on destruction, the way of dying to our old selves." If we really knew how much God loves us, it would kill us." This Holy Week, will we follow the way of Jesus? The hope of the resurrection awaits us there. *Amen.*