

APRIL 5, PALM SUNDAY

Friends,

Palm Sunday is long. Long liturgy (when we can have it!). Long spiritual journey from the triumphal entry to the laying in the tomb. Saying all of this may it seem outlandish to read my next statement: we mustn't go too far along with our remembrance today. We can't carry through to the end. We must stop with the end of Jesus life as he shared it with us. Cross and tomb are our end point on this occasion.

Now you've heard me say often that we are the Easter people, and so we are. But Easter didn't happen in a vacuum. It was not an event that fell from the sky. Therefore, it is vital that we understand that in order for us to be the Easter people, the people of the resurrection promise that where Jesus is we shall also be, we have to be the people of the whole story, the narrative of Israel and the Passion of the Christ.

One of the most powerful techniques we can use to understand the story of the Passion--whatever our level of familiarity with the rich connections between the Passion and the history and prophetic writings of Israel--is an exercise of our imagination in a particular way.

If you remember the old TV show hosted by Walter Cronkite called, "You Are There", you have the idea. You are an observer.

It works like this: you pick an incident or scene in the gospels--for example the triumphal entry we celebrate on Palm Sunday. Now you put yourself in the scene. What do you see, hear, smell, touch and taste? Are you an enthusiastic palm waver, a curious by-stander? Are you a child or an adult? Male or Female, married or single, rich or poor? The idea is to enter into the scene you have chosen as a particular person and to observe the events through that person's eyes. I

Now comes the deeper part of this exercise. Imagine Jesus is looking at you, is speaking to you. What does he say? How do you respond?

The point of doing this is that it helps to focus our attention, rather like taking a long time to look at a painting or a landscape in nature or a single tree or a single leaf, and to see it deeply. Our eyes and brains are very, very good at taking in huge amounts of information quickly--and that is a good thing. But our "inner eye" if you will can reveal to us things that are on a deep level. Done carefully and with practice, this meditative technique can be quite revealing and instructive.

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your name.