

“Donkeys, Dinner, and Drama”  
Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion (B)

Pastor Kelly K. Faulstich  
Grace Lutheran Church  
April 5, 2009

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### *Donkeys*

We're nearing the end of our observance of this season of Lent. We've walked together for almost forty days now, gathering on Sundays and Wednesdays, looking to scripture, practicing spiritual disciplines, and sitting together around dinner tables and in the sanctuary.

This morning we enter into a celebration with shouts of Hosanna, waving palms, and singing of Jesus' triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem. This Palm Sunday, we hear Mark's account of Jesus riding into town on a colt. While other gospel writers and the prophet Zechariah call this animal a donkey, this method of transport was a most humble way for one to arrive into town (Zechariah 9.9, Matthew 21.5, John 12.14-15).

I didn't see many donkeys, or even rusted out cars, lined up out on Bonnie Brae or Division Street this morning. And in most parades I've attended the local celebrities choose convertibles over colts. Even back in Jesus' day, military generals returning from conquest would ride on much more noble animals. The waving of branches and laying down of coats was a way to welcome back majestic warriors and military leaders.

Jesus receives this same welcome; only, it's a little different. "Hosanna!" is a word of acclamation. This would have been the same for the warriors, but donkeys were lowly animals. The animal on which this king Jesus arrives is not that of a warrior. Jesus' arrival is cause for celebration indeed, but not for the kind of accomplishment those first palm wavers expected. Jesus was a little different.

The shouts of "Hosanna" signify that Jesus has come into town to do something amazing, something dramatic. And during this coming week, this week we call Holy, we observe with amazement all that Jesus does.

### *Dinner*

It all starts with palms and Jesus' donkey ride into town, but there's more. This morning, we hear the bookends to Jesus' week leading up to his crucifixion. The triumphant entry and Pilate's piece to the confession of a centurion only frame the journey from Jerusalem to resurrection.

In Mark's gospel account, Jesus enters into Jerusalem, curses a fig tree, then, he cleanses the temple. He goes on to tell parables and to talk about taxes. His authority is challenged. He fields questions while teaching in the temple and comments on a widow's offering. He speaks of the end times and

is anointed by a woman. He gathers around a table with his disciples for a dinner before his demise. He prays in Gethsemane, is arrested and pulled before a religious council.

We only get a piece of Mark's narrative this morning. This is much more to unfold this week, through Mark and the other gospel accounts.

There is even more to celebrate this morning. Every time we gather around the table for Holy Communion, we celebrate the entirety of Holy Week and Jesus' life. Sundays are not counted in the 40 days of Lent because every Sunday is a mini-Easter, a celebration of Jesus resurrection.

This morning, we especially give thanks for the young people in our congregation who will receive their first communion. Just as Jesus welcomed the disciples to dinner on the holy Thursday long ago, Jesus welcomes these young ones to the table this morning.

### *Drama*

Next Sunday, we'll know the celebration when we get there. But in the meantime, this Holy Week is plenty full of drama of its own. We put aside the marshmallow peeps and Cadbury cream eggs for just a little while longer.

- On Maundy Thursday, we will celebrate the dinner we remember as the Last Supper. We will strip the altar and chancel area, just as Christ was stripped before his crucifixion.
- On Good Friday, we will gather for prayer and veneration of the cross. We will extinguish candles and sing hymns that focus our attention on Christ's death on the cross.
- On Holy Saturday, we gather for an Easter vigil. We will hear stories of our faith narrative and celebrate Christ's triumph with Word and two sacraments as twins are baptized.

You see, while store shelves are lined with stuffed bunnies and molded chocolates, we are called to focus on that which grounds us, that which sustains and nourishes us. Holy Week is about worship and meditation and attention focused on that which is the foundation of our faith, the cross of Jesus.

God is so much bigger than all that we can imagine. But God, who is so awesomely huge, also came to the earth to eat with outcasts and to walk with sinners and to heal the sick and to welcome children. God who is massive died on the cross, out of God's great love for all of God's creation.

Holy Week is a time when we recognize God's largeness and at the same time, we recognize how God calls each one of us, "God's child, God's very own" at our baptism.

We've walked together during the forty days of Lent, let us continue our journey in Holy Week, as children of God, called into God's awesomeness and God's *dramatic* love.

To the glory of God.