

Holy Week

A time to Embrace and a Time to Refrain from Embracing

Ecclesiastes 3:5b; Matthew 21:1-27:61; Mark 11:1-15:47; Luke 10:28-23:56; John 12:12-19:42

By the time I travel from Palm Sunday to Easter, I feel as though I've crammed a lifetime into one week.

In an active church like ours, Holy Week is the most tiring week of the liturgical year. Beginning with Palm Sunday and the shouts of Hosanna for the joy of the all the anticipated hope that Jesus' ministry would bring to a broken world. Daily meditation opportunity services and the opportunity to walk the labyrinth. The Wednesday night Taizé service that centers us to be able to get through Maundy Thursday's Last Supper, stripping of the chancel, hallowed wrenching music, and the darkness that leads into Good Friday; where we are left with the knowledge and guilt of what we did to our Lord and the pain and suffering it caused His mother and friends who were looking on in horror and devastation.

It is appropriate to be exhausted, drained, wiped out by the time Easter morning arrives, because that is an essential component of the Holy Week experience, an awareness that Jesus crammed a lifetime into a few short, agonizing days. We cannot get to Easter without first going through Holy Week. To jump from Palm Sunday to Easter without attending to the elements of the final week of Jesus' life minimizes the sacrifice of Christ. There is no way to leap from Hosanna to Hallelujah and still understand the impact of the cross.

Background Information

The liturgical calendar regularly combines Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. The women of our church have enjoyed the company of each other for years making Palm Crosses to prepare us and to provide a meaningful cross to give to the congregation so they can reflect on what happened during this week as we go from Hosanna to Crucify Him before the week is over.

During this week, the paraments will go from purple representing the King the Jews had prayed for who rode into town on a beast of burden (Him carrying the burden of our sins) to change the world. Then black to mourn Him when politics on His day went terribly wrong.

A Time to Embrace and a Time Refrain from Embracing.

It is interesting to note that the writer of Ecclesiastes includes Embracing and Refrain from Embracing in the list of the times and seasons of life. I think the writer suggests that an embrace is far more than a physical act. To embrace is to accept, encircle, surround and include. We embrace whom or what we love. On the night before his death, Jesus gathers the disciples around the table. Before he embraces them as a group one last time, he lines them up and washes their feet. Peter is horrified at the thought of Jesus washing his feet! But Jesus tells him that if he refrains from allowing Jesus to do this for him, he can have no share in Jesus' life. Well, then Peter goes overboard. "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head." Peter doesn't get it; he wants too much - more than he needs and in his eagerness misses the point. There is a time to embrace, and a time to know the limits. How often do we miss the point?

At the empty tomb, Mary weeps and does not recognize Jesus. In her grief, she cannot embrace the resurrection. When Jesus calls her by name, she breaks out in joyous recognition, but Jesus keeps her at a distance. "Do not hold onto me," he says. Mary must refrain from embracing Jesus as she once had, until she can embrace the deep reality of His rising from the dead.

Learning when to embrace and when to refrain from embracing enables us to find a balance in how we live, and in how we allow others to live. Too much embracing can suffocate. Just the right amount can set a person free.

I guess we are learning this lesson during this time when we have been called to isolate (refrain from embracing) from family, friends, jobs, everything that is familiar in order to protect and love each other. Even the strangers among us.

We have walked through the desert these last 40 days. On Sunday we will quietly celebrate the riding in of Jesus into our hearts and we will walk the journey of the week. I know that Francois, Taylor and Lee will prepare special moments for which we will all be able to reflect.

CLOSING PRAYER

Hosanna we shout as Christ rides into our lives.

Hosanna in the highest heaven,

Teach me to embrace your grace

Even as you have embraced the world

In arms that soon will stretch across

A Cross.

Blessed are We who come in the name of the Lord

Hosanna
Amen