

Palm/Passion Sunday
March 28, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever watched a series of events unfold and think to yourself – yeah – I know exactly how this is going to turn out? And then you’ve been totally surprised by the outcome?

If you have, then you are in really good company with Jesus’ first century disciples as they journey with Jesus through his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, his fatal exit out five days later, and then his amazing return on the third day after his crucifixion.

Talk about your whirl wind of emotions! In a matter of a week, they swing from joy, to sorrow, to inexplicable amazement and wonder. It’s an arc from joy, to sorrow, and then back to joy. More like a J really

You can kind of picture it like a snow boarder on the half pipe. They’re on top, and then the bottom, and then back up on top again, providing they don’t crash and burn on the bottom of course. And when they come up on the other side they do some sort of amazing move that makes everyone cheer. That’s Holy Week for you.

Today on Palm/Passion Sunday, we experience just half of the arc, or that first part of the J. We go from palms flying in Jerusalem to death at Golgotha. We go from top to bottom, from joy to sadness, from life to death. But that’s not the full story.

Tune in next Sunday! Well – not really, because every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection, but we can’t get to the resurrection without the crucifixion. No cross, no empty tomb.

So, today we travel with Jesus from the joyful expectation of the crowd, to the devastation of the disciples, and all along everyone was thinking that they knew what was going to happen. They think that death is going to be the end of the story, but it’s not.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, he is seated on a colt that has never been ridden before. That’s significant. Something new is going on, something different, something that none of them can even fathom, not even in their wildest dreams, even though Jesus told them it would happen. God is up to something new.

So, when the crowds shout – Hosanna! God save us! God takes that literally and says “Yes! Yes, I will.”

This is not some human endeavor. This is God acting in our midst, in the flesh, and transforming all of our realities into something new.

This colt has never been ridden before!

And so, knowing what we do, the rest of the story, we look for the surprises in the midst of devastation. We look for the unexpected. We look for God acting in our midst in new and amazing ways.

On Monday, 10 people were gunned down at the King Soopers in Boulder.

Did you know that Colorado has had the most mass shootings out of all of the 50 states? It's like it's in our DNA or something.

I don't know about you, but as disgusted as I was and am, I wasn't really surprised. It didn't surprise me at all. It's as if I now expect things like this to happen. I would have said it was just pandemic fatigue, but a six years ago in Wyoming I had resigned myself to the fact that I'd likely get shot.

Evil just doesn't surprise me anymore. Maybe I'm just old and jaded. Maybe I've just seen enough – like enough – not plenty.

But, it is in these low spots that God is picking up God's momentum.

Just as the snow boarder needs that momentum to propel herself up and above the other side of the wall, so God doesn't let death go unanswered. God does not let death have the final say. God does not let evil win.

On Friday morning, one of the anchors on channel nine said how surprised he was that what had started off as a memorial space of one small section of chain link fence in front of the King Soopers in Boulder had grown to take over the entire city block.

But, that shouldn't be the surprise, because that's exactly where God shows up, in the midst of tragedy bringing comfort and hope. God shows up mourning, because God knows exactly what it's like to lose a son, to lose someone who is dearly beloved.

And God also shows up in suffering. Because on the cross Jesus suffered and any time someone is suffering, Jesus is there with them.

So as Denny, Neven, Rikki, Tralona, Suzanne, Terry, Eric, Keven, Lynn, and Jody lay dying, they were not alone. Jesus was right there with them and he will carry them into eternal life. March 22nd was not the end of their story, just as Good Friday is not the end of Jesus' story.

And so, within Mark's Passion narrative, we have an Easter egg, a foreshadowing of things to come.

Only in Mark do we have this young man in a linen cloth who runs away naked from the Garden of Gethsemane. The guards try to seize him, but he slips out of their grasp and the only thing left is an empty piece of cloth.

Next week, when the women show up at the tomb, guess what they find.

Was anyone surprised to see the naked young man this morning?

As we head into Holy Week, let's expect surprises, good surprises – surprises of love, comfort, and hope - and let's be the unexpected surprise of Jesus' presence wherever we find ourselves, because Jesus has hosanna-ed!

Thanks be to God. Amen.