

Signs of Significance
Submission
Palm Sunday
March 16, 2008
Philippians 2:5-11
Ypsilanti First United Methodist Church

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Palm Sunday is always a day of two different moods. It is a day of contrasts.

First we have the festive mood—the “I love a parade” mood where Jesus enters Jerusalem on the donkey. All the people are shouting and cheering and it is a great and festive affair. The palm branches are waving and who doesn’t love a parade? That’s the first mood of this day.

But we who know the rest of the story, also know that this day includes another mood. This day also includes: A much more somber mood. The week ahead, as the story goes, includes the last Supper, the betrayal, the trial, the crucifixion, death and burial. All that Jesus faced as he walked the lonesome valley to the cross—that’s the second mood of this day—a more somber mood, which includes Jesus submitting to God’s will—saying in the Garden of Gethsemane: Not my will, but yours be done.”

It is a day of contrasts as we move from the festive parade to the death of our Lord. And the Gospel stories tell us that before he faced this final week, Jesus already knew what lay before him. He already knew the path he was to walk. He already knew it, and yet he chose to keep to the path, trusting in God’s love to see him through.

And we, who follow Him, are called to trust in God’s love to see us through as well. The world tells us that the parade is the way, the truth and the life. The fanfare, the waving palms the cheering crowds seem to be the good life.

The real truth is that life is not a parade. While there is much joy, there is also heartache, sorrow, disappointment and loss. In these un-parade like times, what rings true is the way of Christ—
And Christ’s way is the way through death, the way through pain, the way through suffering and sorrow, disappointment and loss.

With his life, Jesus teaches us about trusting in God's love through it all. And by submitting himself to God's will, Jesus shows us that God's love can and does see us through.

But like Jesus, we must trust enough to step out in faith. We must trust enough to submit ourselves to God's way of love and life. To do this, we must, like Jesus give ourselves over to God's agenda. We must relinquish our grip, let go, and let God's love see us through.

The word Submission is our Sign of Significance for today. Submission is the practice of trusting that God's love is the way, the truth and the life. Submission is walking that path of love with God—submission is handing over our agendas, relinquishing control of our stuff, and allowing God's direction to be our own.

This is what we mean when we say in the Lord's prayer: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

What this way requires from us is our faith and trust and our willingness to submit to it—to step out in God's love and to trust that no matter what, it will not let us go.

Jesus, the apostle Paul tells us, chose the way of humility. Instead of power and might, Jesus became vulnerable and human. And Jesus kept to this path, trusting in God's amazing love to see him through. Of course, it's not easy to take this path of submission into God's love. It involves a leap of faith. But if we want to model the life of our Lord, it's a jump we need to make. If we desire the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, we must also leap into service and offer ourselves for the needs of others.

Of course, on Palm Sunday, the citizens of Jerusalem could not know that this Jesus, riding bareback into the city on a young donkey, was actually entering the city to embrace his death only five days hence. They welcomed him as a conquering hero in the tradition of David. He would solve their problems. With power and might as the King he would conquer the powers that be.

But the apostle makes it clear: This isn't what Jesus was about. He "humbled himself," he was concerned about the needs of others, rather than himself. He had a different mindset, and Paul says, it's a mentality of service that we all should adopt. On Palm Sunday, we're reminded that lording it over others doesn't cut it. Following Jesus to the cross means getting into the tuck-position of humility ourselves.

Sometimes we think of humility in such negative terms. We correlate humility with being a victim or having a negative self-image. Let's be very clear here: Humility, after the example of Christ, is not about being a victim nor is it about low self esteem. Instead it is about making conscious choices to follow God and to offer oneself in service and love, compassion and justice, after the example of Christ. It is about being intentional to follow the way of God's love—not through power and might, but through compassion and service.

The apostle Paul says: Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. True success belongs to those who have accepted the self-giving of Christ as the model for Christian behavior. It belongs to those who do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than themselves. It belongs to those who define themselves not in terms of position and power, but in terms of usefulness to God and an ability to serve.

We so easily get it mixed up. We are so easily caught up in the parade, thinking it is the way. The story of Holy Week reminds us of the true power of submission and humility. The story of Holy Week reminds us again about what truly is a life of significance and meaning. And what truly matters.

Back in 2002, I was invited by Ruth Ann Jamnick to say the opening prayer for a legislative session of our State House of Representatives. I decided to bring with me our son, Nick, who was then in the second grade. Before the session started, Nick and I met all kinds of people in our state government, including the speaker of the house, Larry Julian, and the sister of our Lt. Governor, Cherry, as well as other state representatives and dignitaries. Ruth Ann showed us her desk and the buttons she pressed to vote. We had our pictures taken with all sorts of important people, and I gave the opening prayer. Then we left and began the drive home from Lansing. We decided to stop for some ice cream along the way and while we were enjoying it, I asked Nick what his favorite part of the day was? Thinking he might mention some of the important people we met, or our time in the house chamber, I was surprised by his answer to my question.

With his mouth covered in gooey chocolate sauce, Nick looked at me and said—"Mom, the best part of the day for me is right now, right here, eating ice cream with you!"

We so often get it all mixed up don't we? So often we forget what is really significant and what really matters in life. The way of service, the way of humility, the way of putting other's needs before ourselves. As we recall the final week of Jesus' life may we, like him, trust in God's amazing love to see us through. May we trust God's love enough to step out in faith. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Amen