



ST BART'S

A Sermon by
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A Parade of Passion

*Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, March 20, 2016
The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday—Based on Luke 23:1-49*

When I was a child I loved parades! I loved the colors, the cotton candy, the bands, the animals, and the anticipation. What I learned early on is that in most of the best parades resides an important figure...

.... Christmas — Santa Claus

.... Barnum and Bailey — the elephants

.... July 4th — Uncle Sam

.... The Grapefruit League — the players: Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale,
Roberto Clemente, and Harmon Killebrew.

One way of looking at Palm Sunday is a kind of Passion Parade. It wasn't like the Saint Patrick's Day parade of this past Thursday, making its way up Fifth Avenue with the stripe in the middle painted green and bagpipe and drum bands playing. It wasn't a high-stepping white charger that Jesus rode — only a bandy-legged little unbroken colt with a few old coats thrown over its back for a saddle. And presumably there were only a relative few — of the 2.5 million pilgrims in Jerusalem for Passover — watching him ride by on it, some of them a rag-tag group of followers.

Oh, there was word on the street of a new, emerging monarch, an anointed one that Israel had been waiting centuries for and waits for still. He was the holy one who would bring peace and justice to a world overrun by the Romans. He was to be the blessed one who, according to Isaiah, would heal the sick, restore sight to the blind and free the oppressed. No wonder Jesus' followers were excited with anticipation. It must have been unthinkable that in less than a week the one who was hailed as king that day would be abandoned, tried in a trumped up trial, humiliated, spat upon, whipped and then put to death on a Roman cross.

In Dallas, Texas, in November of 1963 a man with a home movie camera took some footage of another parade of sorts, and we have all of us seen it replayed over and over again as we have also seen Palm Sunday replayed over and over again. The bare-headed young president sits in the back seat of an open car with his elegant young wife beside him and people lining the road cheering and waving as he drives by, and if you're like me, even as you watch it, and know full well the terrible thing that is only moments away from happening, you can't help hoping against hope and all reason that this time by some miracle it won't happen. The assassin with his rifle will miss this time, or he'll change his mind, or the president's car will move slightly to the left, and one way or another the world will be spared the aching sadness and sense of irreparable loss.

And so it is with Jesus' parade of passion. There is the same kind of crazy hope that maybe this time — somehow, some way — Judas will be more loyal, Peter will have a surge of bravery, Pilate will have a moment of real compassion, this time the crowd will call for Barabbas, and that somehow all of the religious pilgrims around Jerusalem will recognize this One from Nazareth as the great hope. But as with young Jack Kennedy, that outcome will not come to pass.

So the question, of course, for all of Jerusalem, and for each of us, is NOT will we respond? Jesus always evokes a response! The deeper question is "How will we respond?"

- + Will we simply hold a palm and skip to next Sunday and enjoy the Easter flowers?
- + Will we stand on the sidelines — as a bystander — as I did at the St. Patrick's Day Parade the other day ... never risking participation?
- + Will we become cynical about the larger world and decide to "check out"?
- + Will we avoid and deny the troubles and challenges and just move to the next chapter with a smile on our faces?
- + Will we thrash around in anger and fear, disregarding those who are not like us?
- + Or, will we enter into a deeper acceptance of the One who seeks out and saves the lost?

To gain a perspective as to how we might respond, let's look again at how Jesus responded. What did he do? The Apostle Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Philippians:

"God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied divine life, taking the form of a servant, and being found in this form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

How did Jesus respond?

- WITH PASSION!
- with *passio*: Latin, meaning a suffering love for and with others.

And where and how did Jesus respond with passion?

In the *Book of Common Prayer* (p. 282), there resides one of the most poignant prayers ever written. The petition asks Jesus: "Set your passion, cross and death between your judgment and our souls now and in the hour of our death."

In short, Jesus places his passion on the line! He places his passion on the margins, among the outcasts, with the immigrants, with the hurting, with those disenfranchised, with those breaking apart, with the bored, with those who have lost their zeal, with those whose bodies no longer work, with those with mental illness, with those who have been abused by the world. And in placing perfect love and compassionate mercy on the line, you and I are enabled to live with forgiveness, freedom, justice, reconciliation, compassion, welcome, inclusion, purpose, dignity and respect.

And so I ask each of us: "Where do you and I put our passion?"

After Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in Ford's Theatre in 1865, his body was placed on a train that became a memorial parade. The train wound its way ever so slowly from Washington, DC, through the countryside on the way to Illinois, where Mr. Lincoln was to be buried.

When it stopped in Albany, New York, an African American woman, a former slave who had been freed through the underground railroad, held up her grandbaby, who had been born into freedom. She held that baby high, looking as Mr. Lincoln's casket, and she declared — with tears streaming down her face —
 "Take a long look honey; he died for your freedom and liberation!"

In a larger venue, for all people and throughout time, Christians dare to proclaim about Jesus of Nazareth: "Take a long look, honey, he died for your freedom and liberation."