

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner  
Episcopal Church of All Saints and Ascension  
Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday/Year A  
April 5, 2020  
Matthew 21: 1-11

*“...When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’”*

And so it begins, this week that is called “holy”. And it begins with a parade, a celebration. And who doesn’t like a parade or a good celebration? There usually is no holding back as people get together and raise the roof with noise, music, cheers and laughter. There is unbridled energy that permeates everything which is how this day, Palm Sunday or the Sunday of the Passion begins. Even the staidest of churches somehow come alive as choirs, congregations and clergy process in waving palm branches and joining in the singing of “All Glory, Laud and Honor”.

But things are different this year as we worship from within the confines of our homes. There are no vergers or clergy herding us in place. No discussions with ushers on when to distribute palms. No checking and double-checking cues and pitches with choir directors and/ or musicians to make sure we are relatively on target once we enter the sanctuary. (Believe me, I have heard some train wrecks down through the years! LOL!!!) All kidding aside, in this age of technology we can go to the internet and find our hymn and sing along or find a service (or two or three) that is being live-streamed and pray and sing along.

Whatever we find, our hosannas will grow quiet and the festive mood that was experienced will in fact, wane. All too soon we find that there is nothing much to celebrate as the reading of the Passion reminds us of what happened at the end of the week some two thousand years ago.

Palm Sunday is such a strange day.

But go back with me to the reading we read at the very beginning of the service. Let's go back to where Jesus was making preparations to go into Jerusalem.

The text from Matthew tells us that Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead with these directions, "*Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.'*" "*The Lord needs them.*"

That in itself seems odd! Why would the Lord need a donkey and her colt? Why not a stallion? A fine carriage? In fact, why would he *need* anything? Isn't this the same Lord who was present before the creation of the world? Isn't he the King of kings and the Lord of lords? But in fact, the Lord did need the simplest of animals and chose those that were surefooted and able to carry heavy loads. In doing so, Jesus would fulfill that was said of him in the Book of the Prophet Zechariah, "*...Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*"

As I reflected on Jesus' need that day, the question arose within my spirit: "The Lord Jesus needed a donkey and her baby. "Does the Lord need me?" The answer became clearer as I discerned this question, not only for myself but in the context of who we are as church. "Does the Lord need us?" And the answer is, yes! I am reminded of a gospel song from a long time ago: *If you can use anything, Lord, you can use me!* And not just me but Bill and Cassandra, and Michael, and Laura and John and Alexia and Sanford and...And...and... Oh, you get my point: YES, ALL OF US!

No matter what we have been experiencing over these last couple of months, even days-the Lord needs us! The Lord needs us to go beyond our "celebration" of Palm Sunday and to walk with him; to be used by him. Not only during this week deemed "holy" but each and every day of our lives. That is what being a Christian is all about-walking with our God and allowing ourselves to be used for the glory and honor of God with all that we are, just as we are, and with all that we have.

And we take our clue from this day on which branches were cut from trees and the cloaks of peasants lined the streets near the gates of Jerusalem

to welcome the Son of David. We take our clue from the Lord of Lords who needed the simplest of animals, a donkey and her colt.

There is a poem, a writing, attributed to St. Teresa of Avila which says:

*Christ has no body now but yours  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours  
Yours are the eyes through which He looks with  
Compassion on this world  
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good  
Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world  
Yours are the hands  
Yours are the feet  
Yours are the eyes  
You are His body  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours*

Yes, sisters and brothers, the Lord needs you and me. No Ph.D. or seminary training needed! Christ needs us to feed the poor and clothe the naked. Christ needs us to make others laugh and to be present when they cry. Christ needs us to reach out to one another and to others as best we can even in this time of unknowing. Email somebody. Text somebody. Get on Facebook. Zoom. Heck, just pick up the phone and call somebody!

Christ needs us to be church even as we cannot physically be together. Because the church isn't just a building. The church is us. And we and our community and the world will be a better place because each of us will have offered ourselves, our love, our gifts no matter how simple or great.

Sing with me!

*All glory, laud, and honour  
To Thee, Redeemer, King!  
To Whom the lips of children  
Made sweet Hosannas ring,*

*Thou art the King of Israel  
Thou David's Royal Son,  
Who in the Lord's name comest,  
The King and Blessed One!*

Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!

*Just a note...*

I want to make sure to that each of you knows that you are loved by me and by our God. This is a difficult time for all of us as we are physically distancing ourselves. There are some of you who live alone just as I do. Please, please, please do not isolate yourselves. Do reach out by phone, cards, notes, etc. Be careful if you have to go out of your homes for any reason. *Remember to wash those hands!*

Many of you have heard by now that all the church doors in the Diocese of Missouri are shuttered/closed until further notice. Bishop Smith, like other bishops within the Episcopal Church, thought it necessary to keep the risk of infection down. And I am truly sorry about all this because I was looking forward to celebrating my first Holy Week and Easter with you. And I am sorry that we cannot share in the Eucharistic Feast of Bread and Wine. But we will get through this!

This means that both Karen and I will be working more from home than usual but we are available by phone (and text) and email. I have never been on Facebook so much before all this but I have been posting prayers and Scripture on our church Facebook page and on my own page. Those are also ways to stay connected. I/we are indebted to Karen who keeps things running smoothly and to Sanford who keeps our website and weekly postings going so that we can all stay informed. There are some things however that cannot be done at home like paying bills, receiving and sending mail like worship booklets to our shut-ins and those who do not have internet access, among other things. Since our Food Pantry is not operating as it was, I am committed to regularly making sure that our Little Library is also stocked with canned goods for those who need them. And yes, I am making sure that the plants are watered!

The churches in the diocese are all feeling or will feel the financial burden in all of this so please, if you can, send in your tithes by mail or put them through the mail slot.

And lastly, please continue to pray for each other. Pray for all those on our prayer lists. Pray for those celebrating birthdays this month: Sylvia, Pat, Earl, Steve, Adrienne, Cassandra, and Laura.

Pray for those who are going in to work especially those among us who are health care providers. Pray for those who are feeling even more alone physically, mentally, and spiritually. Pray for those who are sick.

And we pray for Deborah, Allen, and Alexia Dukes as Deborah's mother and our sister in Christ, Mattie, has gone home to be with God.

*"Our sister, Mattie, was washed in baptism and anointed with the Holy Spirit; give her fellowship with all your saints."-BCP*

God bless you and keep you. And know that you are LOVED.

Your sister in the Redeemer,

Rev. Renee+