

## “Looking Beyond the Tragedy!”

**T**here are two titles for today— you might have noticed it on the cover of the worship booklet— the Sunday of the Passion, and Palm Sunday. And that’s because there are two parts to our liturgy this morning. We’ve also heard two readings from Luke’s gospel. The first tells of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The other tells of Jesus’ final hours of life on earth. Therefore, today has two distinctive moods: There’s the joyous frenzy of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. And the solemn, anguish that surrounded Jesus as he died. One day, two moods.

It almost seems to violate that law of physics that says that two objects cannot occupy the same place at the same time. In fact, once, I heard a physicist use this very law to argue that the Incarnation of Jesus— that is, Jesus was fully human *and* fully divine— could not possibly have happened. My response to that argument was, in effect, “Well then, you’ve obviously never raised children.”

I mean, I can remember occasions when one of our girls— and probably because she was simply overly tired— began crying inconsolably and laughing uncontrollably *at the same time*.

Yeah, those were good times.

So, here we are, one day, two titles, two moods, and seemingly with at least two lessons to teach us.

One of the lessons this day is teaching us is that victory is on the other side of the coin from defeat, that success is on the other side of the coins from failure, and that hope is on the other side of the coin from despair. And, just as easily as we can flip a coin in the air, our lives can go from one side of that coin to the other (and maybe even back again).

But more to the point of what Luke is telling us, is that we can just as easily switch from being part of the crowd that is cheering for Jesus as he enters Jerusalem, to being part of the crowd that is condemning Jesus and calling for his

crucifixion. Just like Peter who professes steadfast devotion to Jesus in one moment, and then denies even knowing Jesus in the next.

And the reason for that, is because characteristics of human life, quite often, is unresolved ambiguity.

That's why Jesus can be praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, and in one moment be saying, "Let this cup pass from me," and in the next moment be saying, "Not my will but thine be done."

And we're the same way.

Fortunately for us, there's a another lesson that this day is teaching us, and it's this: God's love given *to us*, and God's love given to others *through us*, is one of the few things that can help us make sense of the hard things that life throws our way. God's love can do that.

And even though that love won't mean that life will be pain-free— Jesus on the Cross should teach us that— however, that love of God does make it possible for us to bear those hard things that confront us, to better understand them, and help us find a way through the.

In fact, this may be the most important lesson that today can teach us: that, out of one's suffering— perhaps, despite our suffering, meaning and hope can arise. This is why a woman who has just undergone the pain of childbirth can, just as quickly as it's over, contemplate repeating the process.

And even though pain and suffering are inevitable, they are not the end of our story, because the love and grace of God can take us to the next chapter.

This morning, we have moved through our readings from triumph to tragedy. And the temptation is to somehow skip the bad parts and rush ahead to the good parts; to focus on the palms gospel and ignore the passion gospel. Because that's how we'd prefer it to be in our own lives. But, just as Jesus could not avoid the Cross, neither can we avoid all the suffering, all the conflict, nor all the tragedy of our lives.

It happens to us all.

But here is something worth remembering: Just as the Cross was not the end of the story for Jesus, neither is suffering, or conflict, or tragedy the end of the story for us.

On that Palm Sunday two thousand years ago, Jesus could only look ahead to the coming week and wonder how he was going to make it through to Easter. But he would never learn the answer to that question until he took the next step.

And that's the way it is with us.

When all we can see before us is are bad things, our faith may try to assure us that God will help us through it; but at the same time, our hearts and minds are filled with doubt: "How can God possibly redeem this mess?" And we'll never know the answer to that question until we take the next step.

In the end, Jesus did not die in order to make everything just fine, thank you. He died so that we might discover, despite our weakness and suffering, a new and unrealized strength. He died, so that we might find— in our own brokenness— renewal and hope.

In her book entitled *The Wonder Worker*, Susan Howatch includes this remarkable quote that touches on what I'm talking about: "A cure is the disabled person who gets up from his bed and walks. A healing is that same disabled person coming to terms with his lack of mobility, transcending his anger and grief, and becoming an inspiration to all those who visit him."

Jesus did not die in order to take away the ambiguity of life, but to allow us to live life more fully despite the ambiguity. And to get to where Jesus is leading us, we start by looking at the Cross, at a suffering and bleeding Savior.

And while we are looking, knowing that beyond the tragedy there is truth, and there is redemption, and there is hope.

Amen.