

Sermon for Palm Sunday A  
Sunday, April 9, 2017  
“Palm Sunday: Bipolar”

Text: Matthew 26:36 – 27:66

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

If a clinical diagnosis could be assigned to a liturgical event, Palm Sunday would be considered bipolar, that is manic-depressive. The liturgy starts out on a manic high with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding on a colt as though a king or an emperor, and then it degenerates to a depressive low with a tortured, crucified Jesus dying on a cross. But, after hearing the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, there is really little I could say, because the story speaks for itself. The story preaches itself. We are meant to hear the story just as it is, without pretense, without a lot of fluff. And we're going to hear it again on Friday—it's just that important; we get to hear the same story twice in the same week.

But Palm Sunday, the Sunday of the Passion, is like the prequel to a movie, it's sort of a trailer. You know how we like to surf the web, hang out on the internet and waste our time when we're supposed to be doing something productive. And every now and again we may find ourselves checking out the trailers for the movies that will be released in the upcoming months. And a trailer gives an insight of what the movie is all about. You can't simply watch the trailer and say that you've seen the movie. If you want to get the whole story, if you want to be able to connect the pieces, people, and places, then you have to go see the movie. The prequel gives some highlights and tells us that something worth noting is about to take place. Palm Sunday does the same thing for us in our liturgical life and cycle. We get a glimpse of the whole story in large part because it's so familiar; we know how it's going to play out and we know how the story will end. Palm Sunday tells us that the events over the coming week are such a substantial and important part of our journey of faith as Christians that the story that it must be taken seriously. But Palm Sunday is the prequel. It is the trailer to something worth taking note of. But, the prequel is not the main episode.

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of a different season. We're still in a penitential season, but today begins Holy Week. You notice the

colors are different. They are red, or technically oxblood. Palm Sunday sets the stage and gives us the background to what's coming. Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem put him in the right place what comes next. The main event of the week is the Triduum, that is Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday—the Three Holy Days. I'd like to thank Lance Davis, our Music Director, who also happens to have a degree in church history and liturgy for writing the brief synopsis of those three holy days that are included in your bulletins today. The Triduum is the main event, and it must be taken seriously, because without it, the next chapter in the story of our very essence being Christians won't make sense.

Now, I hope you notice that I talk about it in the singular; I do so because it is *one* event. When the mass begins on Maundy Thursday with the opening acclamation, the liturgical event will not end until the dismissal at the First Mass of Easter on Saturday night following the Vigil. But there's so much important stuff for us to hear and experience, that we have to receive it in small chunks and digest it before moving onto the next part. To miss any part of the Triduum is like watching the first 5 minutes of a movie, going away to do something else, and coming back to watch the last 5 minutes of the movie. The ending won't make sense if you don't stay for the middle and see how the story develops, how the characters develop, and to connect the dots between the beginning and the end. Holy Week is the same. If you just come today and then don't come back until Easter, you'll miss the connection between the two and you won't fully get why Easter is so wonderful. You can't enjoy the mountaintop that is Easter unless you journey through the valley that is Passion Week. Not only that, if you don't come, you'll miss some of the oldest and most beautiful and most ancient liturgies of Christianity and links to the core statements of our doctrine and faith. So, add it to your calendars, tell your boss you need to be finished with work early or need the day off, set whatever reminders you need, but be here. You need to know and experience the story.

OK, Father. So you want me to adjust my life to be here during the Triduum, and you tell me the story is important. And, that's nice. But what does all that have to do with my day to day life? Well, I'll tell you. Remember how I told you that Palm Sunday is bipolar—manic and depressive in one hour. Holy Week is bipolar too. Manic in the triumphal

entry on Palm Sunday, depressive by Good Friday, and then manic again on Easter Sunday. Life itself is manic, if you think about it. It's a constant tug-of-war between happy times and sad times, gains and losses. And in the process of us trying to make through that complex journey called life, we still find Jesus walking it with us, owning it for us, and defeating it. Just like he met torture and death head on and defeated it. So, embrace this Holy Week. Experience its bipolarity. Let it transform you once again into the disciple God desires you to become. Amen.

#### Resource

Commentary on Matthew 27:11-54 in *The Working Preacher*,  
[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2019](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2019)