

On Sunday, April 17, 2011, The Rev. Cornel Barnett and SFTS Intern Christina L. Jensen offered complementary homilies for Palm/Passion Sunday. Ms. Jensen spoke on “Palm Sunday Reflections” and The Rev. Cornel Barnett spoke on the “Passion.” Both are presented below

Christina L. Jensen, Intern  
Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
April 17, 2011  
Matthew 21:1-11  
“Palm Sunday Reflections”

Imagine what it must have been like to be one of Jesus’ disciples.

Even from the beginning, when Jesus first showed up, you just dropped everything, and left all of your family, friends, and the life you used to know, and started to follow him. From town to town, and countryside to countryside, you and the others would follow him, listening to his teachings, and following his example.

This time was no different. You and the others were travelling with Jesus, coming up on a small town just outside of Jerusalem. This time, though, Jesus asked two of you to go into town and fetch a donkey and her colt and to tell anyone who asked about it that “the Lord has need of them.” This was a little confusing, because Jesus hadn’t really asked for this before. You and the others wondered what was up, but didn’t really venture to ask, and instead the two just went into town and did what was requested of them.

Now, when the two had returned with the donkey and colt, there were some very interesting things going on. First of all, we put our cloaks on the animals so Jesus could ride into Jerusalem on them. This was different because most of the time, Jesus walked into a town or village or city just like the rest of us. Even more strange, secondly, was that, as we approached the city of Jerusalem, people lined the streets, and laid their cloaks and palm branches down in the road for Jesus to enter the city on. It was as if they had spread out the carpet to welcome him into town. The people were loud with their welcome, as well, and they shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” And this continued, all the way into the city.

Now, when we got into Jerusalem, things were a little hectic. The city officials, and others in the city, were demanding to know “Who is this?? Who is this??” because they did not know or realize

who Jesus was, nor how he had the power to gather so many people simply with his presence. The throngs of people who had gathered and welcomed him with shouts of “Hosanna!” were eager to name him, shouting, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

It was an incredible thing - watching Jesus ride into town, low and humble on a donkey, and then to see the swarms of people come out of town to greet him by laying down their cloaks and palm branches, and waving other palms, and shouting “Hosanna!” as he came near, and the small amount of chaos happening in town was actually kind of funny to watch as the city officials scrambled to figure out who this mystery man was.

That trip into Jerusalem was one of the best moments in our lives. Little did we know what was still to come.

The Rev. Cornel Barnett, D.Min.  
Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
April 17, 2011  
Matthew 27:11-54  
Palm/Passion Sunday  
Passion

You have noticed: The worship service has shifted. We began with the hosannas of the palms and we are now slap-bang into destruction, darkness and death of the passion which precedes the alleluias of Easter.

We hope that everyone here and your family and friends will be at this week’s Good Friday worship service at 7 pm. The liturgy is powerful and the choir will sing deeply meaningful songs from Joseph M. Martin’s *Song of the Shadows*.

For those who absolutely cannot be at a Good Friday service the denomination encourages, perhaps requires, that we convey its message today on the premise that the road from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday must go through Good Friday.

The dominant themes of the passion are darkness and death and destruction as in destructive behavior which is rife in today’s gospel story.

Darkness is literal in that the region becomes dark from noon to 3 pm. This is the high point of dark on this dismal day. It catches up and confirms all the darkness that places Jesus on the cross. These are universal events.

The most hurtful incident precedes today's reading. It's Judas' betrayal. How painful it is when your closest friend or family member betrays you. The irony is that Jesus died for this person's salvation.

Then there's the shattering hurtfulness of everyone in the story. Why such scorn against a good man? God alone knows. The destructive behaviors are in:

- The religious leaders who persuade people to ask for Jesus' death
- The crowds who accuse Jesus and cry "crucify him!"
- Pilate who washes his hands and has Jesus flogged
- The soldiers who strip Jesus and twist a crown of thorns on his head and mock him, spit on him and beat him
- The bystanders who deride him, and
- The bandits who taunt him

It's no wonder that Jesus cries his all too human cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me."

Jesus died for the salvation of these persons.

Darkness, darkness, darkness and death. "Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last." I've watched a person die. It's not a pretty sight.

That's where we will leave it until Good Friday for those who will be there and until Easter Sunday for those who will not be at a Good Friday service. We end with a light which always shines from God in Jesus, even in death. It comes in the words of the centurion and some in the crowd: "Truly this man was God's Son!" It will take three days and generations to appreciate the import of these words. Amen.