**Reflection - The Rev. Herbert Jones**
You will remember that the usual Palm Sunday liturgy is much more involved than what we are able to do with our new way of doing worship. We normally would gather somewhere other than the sanctuary for a blessing of the palms and process with great purpose and pageantry, into the church. This is the way we pay homage to Jesus’ entrance into the city of Jerusalem as he begins the last week of his unresurrected life. We would normally process outside to the entrance of the church, singing “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest!”

Once we enter the church, things change, and what at first appears to be a joyous entry into Jerusalem is contrasted by what happens once we get to Jerusalem, which is what we commemorate in Holy week. Betrayal, trial, crucifixion, death, and of course, finally, resurrection. We’re not there yet. The entry into the city, as it is juxtaposed to what happens once we get there, presents for us a huge paradox. It’s a paradox that we examine through all of Holy Week. In actuality, it’s a paradox and tension we are called to examine our whole lives, joy and sadness, light and darkness, death and resurrection.

We get a sense of this tension from the prayers we normally say as we move towards the church on Palm Sunday.  We start the service with the blessing of the palms. Here is part of that prayer:

*On this day he entered the holy city of Jerusalem in triumph, and was proclaimed as King of kings by those who spread their garments and branches of palm along his way. Let these branches be for us signs of his victory, and grant that we who bear them in his name may ever hail him as our King, and follow him in the way that leads to eternal life.*

It is a prayer about Christ’s victory and kingship. But in the short time that it would take us to walk from the parish hall to the front door of the church, our prayer changes from hailing Christ as King, with no mention whatsoever of the suffering of Christ, to this prayer, that we say before we enter the Church:

*Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace.*

Quite a different sounding prayer. And one that clearly identifies the paradox of Palm Sunday. But the paradox, contradiction and tension can be put into even starker language. In the few minutes that it takes us to get from out there to in here, the words of the followers of Jesus changed from “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” to “Crucify him, crucify him.”

We’re doing Palm Sunday and Holy week differently this year. You all know that. One thing we normally do on Palm Sunday is that we read the Passion gospel, that is, the gospel rendition of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. We’re not going to do that this morning. And in fact, there’s a somewhat unhappy reason that we have taken to reading the passion on Palm Sunday anyway. We didn’t used to. We used to read it only on Good Friday, which is the more appropriate time to read it.

In modern times Palm Sunday has become known as “Passion Sunday” and we read the passion gospel on Palm Sunday because we know that not many people come to church on Good Friday! This year at St. Thomas we’re going to wait.

But as we wait for what will inevitably come, I invite you to live into the paradox, and to explore how the idea of paradox may be playing out in your own lives. It always does, and it is worth looking for. Pain and joy, life and death, beauty and ugliness, light and darkness, are all part of our lives, inwardly and out there in the real world.

T.S. Eliot said that April is the cruelest month, and in making that statement I believe he was talking about paradox and the pain we suffer when our darkest corners are exposed by cleansing light. And in our world dominated by virus, April may turn out to be the cruelest month indeed.

We will walk through it together. Join me over the next week as we begin our journey through the darkness and into the light of resurrection. Live into the gospel and explore where it may take you inwardly. This is a difficult time and it is also a very rich time. Let’s walk together and see where the journey takes us.