

## **What Is God Walking Into?**

Rev. John Allen

This year Holy Week will be different.

We will meet greet Easter from our own homes rather than in this Sanctuary.

Our Maundy Thursday service will retell the story, but without our ability to reach out and share bread from one another's hands as Christ did so long ago.

And it all starts today, with Palm Sunday. In other years by now this Sanctuary would be full. The children would have handed you each a Palm. The donkey would have made an appearance.

We'd be waving these palms. Singing together. Descants soaring atop our hymns of praise and joy.

And, as many of you have experienced, one of the highlights of the year for me is leading us all in rousing shouts of Hosanna!

It is one of the most exuberant moments of praise in this congregations life. And it never fails to lift my spirit.

But this year feels like the right time to make a confession. As much as I love our celebration of Palm Sunday. There is something looming over it all.

A betrayal. An arrest. Denial. The cross.

And I think it is ok to enjoy Palm Sunday, and let those things loom. Just off camera. After all, that is how most everyone experienced that first Palm Sunday.

Maybe a bit uneasy. But ultimately joy-filled. Welcoming their savior with a parade through the streets.

Offering the closest thing that could to a royal parade with their humble means. Branches and cloaks laid on the ground, and a borrowed donkey.

That is what the people were experiencing. It is what we remember and re-enact. Their eyes were on Jesus. The one who had come for them, at long, long, last.

Only Jesus, was looking ahead down the road. Only he could see clearly what lay ahead. His eyes saw the road ahead, covered with palms, but winding toward the cross. And yet he urged that animal on, step, after step, after step.

Most years we see Palm Sunday with the eyes of the crowd, fixed on the joy of seeing Christ.

This year, I think we meet this day more with the eyes of Jesus, looking down an untraveled road with a growing certainty that it does not lead anywhere we really want to go.

We have been given every reason to expect that the next few weeks will see the peak of this pandemic in our area.

The peak of deaths, of overflowing ICUs, of doctors being asked to make impossibly difficult choices.

The human cost coming into clear focus and sharp relief.

What looms off to the side most years, has moved right into focus.

This year Holy Week will be different.

And perhaps we will need it like we never had before.

Jesus suffering was not just the precursor to a miracle. It is not all just a set up to make Easter especially amazing. The stories of this week have a meaning all their own. And it this:

When you find yourself on a road leading you step-by-reluctant-step toward suffering, you can look to your side and find Christ taking each step with you.

God does not wish this for anyone. But God has taken this road a thousand times before, and is on it, with us, today.

You could think that faith only means belief. That faith means believing that everything will work out in the end.

But faith also means trust. And sometimes faith is nothing more than trusting the one who willingly walks this way with you, feeling the resolve that comes from God's solidarity with the hurting, the courage that comes from God's presence in the pain.

Sometimes the miracle is not the outcome. It is just the fact that God is right there with us in the midst of everything going wrong.

That is what this week is about in the story of our faith.

And I expect that this will be what this week is about in the story of our world.

And the good news of our faith is not any triumph or ultimate reward.

But the simple fact that God, who perhaps could have easily floated above the ugliness of history, instead chose to live in this world, and who in this world could have lived any imaginable life, but chose time and time again to step toward the brokenhearted, cast-out, and suffering. And who even when the people threw him a parade fit for a king, had his eyes down the road on a waiting cross.

God chose that, so that in this, we could never feel alone.