

Palm Sunday: the Sunday of the Passion

March 28, 2021

The Reverend Dr. Brent Was

“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord..”

Good morning, everyone. A blessed Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion to you.

One of my Lenten practices this year has been to read *Lent with Evelyn Underhill*. It is a daily reader of excerpts from Underhill’s work compiled by the Rt. Reverend G.P. Mellick Belshaw, the late Bishop of New Jersey. It is quite excellent.

Today, Palm Sunday, the good bishop and Ms. Underhill remind us of what St. Paul wrote to the church of Rome about what it means to be part of the church. She wrote, “It means, Paul says...being received into the death of Christ – the unconditional sacrifice of the Cross – in order to walk in newness of life: transformed through self-loss into a bit of that Body which is indwelt and rules by the Spirit of Divine Charity.” To be part of the church is to be received into the death of Jesus Christ... Transformation through self-loss...

In yesterday’s selection, Underhill related to us the words of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Franciscan mystic Angela of Foligno that are a practice of being received in Christ’s death. St. Angela said, “Make yourselves small! Make yourselves very small.”

In a normal Lent I would spend a lot of time talking up Holy Week. I'd emphasize the importance of observing the whole of the Triduum, the three day cycle of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, culminating in the most important night of the year, the Great Vigil of Easter. We read the Passion on Palm Sunday to account for everyone who skips the Holy Week liturgies. But in a normal Lent, I would pull out the big guns encouraging everyone to come to the whole of Holy Week. It doesn't work, Holy Week, the joy of saying the H-A-double L-E-L (you know the rest of it) it isn't as joyous if you haven't knelt in the darkness of Good Friday together.

This is not a normal Lent. Again it is not normal. Yes, you can come for communion today and get palms. There is a resource in the eClare about Maundy Thursday, readings and prayers for your own Agapè feast. We will walk the stations of the Cross with the folks at First Congregational on Friday, (and there is an in person option with that, we'll talk at the announcements) and then we will join the Episcopal Churches in Downeast for the Good Friday liturgy on Friday evening. We'll kindle the light of Christ in the Great Vigil with our Episcopal brethren at Trinity and St. Brendan's. And then we will have Easter together, Zoom together and then at our drive-thru communion with hats and hot cross buns even on Sunday. But this is not a normal Lent.

And maybe that is ok. We'll have to make do in any case, but maybe this is an opportunity for us to make ourselves small. To really focus on being received into the death of Christ. To really rest into the story, the

story of Jesus Christ and His friends and the sacrifices they made for us, and to do that in our own hearts. On our own time. If we have anything right now, we have time.

We have gotten good at sacrifice this year. You have gotten good at it. At setting your own needs as secondary to the needs of others. All that you gave up this year... the hugs, the visits, Maine. Jobs. Opportunity. Friendships. Life as you know it. You gave that up for others. When you wear a mask. When you get the shot. When you keep following the rules. When you are patient in waiting for the Pentecost revival of our in person celebration of the Holy Eucharist... When you have made those sacrifices, as you continue to make those sacrifices of your freedom and comfort, you are making yourself small. You are accepting your reception into the death of Jesus Christ. And in accepting that death, you are welcomed into the eternal life of that same Lord and Savior.

For this Holy Week I encourage you take the sacrificially solitary time we are forced into and put it to good use. Read, and even reread the Passion of St. Mark. Read the scripture for each day of Holy Week (all of that is in the eClare). These readings speak for themselves. That is why this sermon will be so short. Of course all are welcome to join us if you can for Good Friday and the Vigil, but take this quiet time our world has and seek God with the Word God has given us. Be received into the death of Jesus Christ. “Make yourselves small! Make yourselves very small.”

AMEN