

are in no position to make final judgements on the things that happen to us. A certain event may have every appearance of evil at the time it occurs, like a valued horse running away or a leg getting broken. And yet, in the mysterious unfolding of life, what seemed so bad at the time turns out to be the means of unexpected good. Had the horse not run off, the 12 new horses would not have come. Had the leg not been broken, the son's life might have been lost. Therefore, the old farmer's reaction each time was profoundly wise. He accepted the shape of his creatureliness and refused to hand down ultimate verdicts on things until they had run their course.

The second conclusion is a bright and hopeful one; namely that God is at work for good. The One who created the universe and knows fully the essence of good and evil is, in fact, an ingenious chemist, capable of taking what looks for all the world like lead and bringing forth from it astonishing gold. God is rarely obvious or predictable in how God works, but again and again in history God takes the worst of times and does the best with them, like with the runaway horse and the broken leg. And like God does with the death of Jesus on the cross.

The extreme swing of emotions on this Palm Sunday reminds us that Christ is with us **at the pinnacle of joy and when we are in the depths of despair**. Jesus has been both places himself. He has experienced the joys of heaven, and he has also experience the terrors of despair and the agony of an excruciating death. He experienced it all for us and he is with us in the midst of our experience. He is even with us in the mundane routines of everyday life. He is with us always even to the end of the age.

Conclusion: Because of Jesus we can rejoice in the resurrection. Even as we grieve or anticipate the death of a loved one, we can find courage to endure the changes and chances of life, knowing we are not alone. We can ride out both the highs and lows of life knowing that Jesus is with us and will ultimately save us.

Amen. Thanks be to God!!

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A Message from Mark!

Mixed Emotions

28 March 2010 - Palm Sunday

Scripture ~ Luke 19: 28-40

Can you feel it? Can you feel the conflicting emotions of this day we call Palm Sunday? We begin the service waving palms, shouting Hosannas, singing songs of praise. But we know of a sudden shift to come and in a few days we're reading the story of the death of Jesus. This Jesus, who had been welcomed as a hero, is, within days, killed as a common criminal. Many of the same people who had shouted, "*Hosanna, save us,*" later scream with hatred, "*Crucify him!*"

I think one of the things that is so hard about this time of year is the extreme contrast in emotions. How does one encompass the mood swing from triumph to tragedy, from the heights of joy to the depths of despair, from seeing Jesus surrounded by people waving palms to seeing Jesus utterly abandoned as he hangs on a cross.

Once I might have said Palm Sunday was unique, that it is the only time in the church year that we experience this huge contrasting of emotions. Having thought about it a bit more, I now believe this contrast is reflective of life and of our journey of faith.

Think of the emotions experienced at a funeral. In January, Adam, a young man of thirty-two years, died by his own hand. He left behind his wife Vanessa and three beautiful children. His wider family and all of the large congregation I faced were numb with shock. He had struggled for years with depression. His death was devastating to the family. They were overwhelmed with grief and the pain of his absence. I preached the funeral sermon with tears rolling down my cheeks. Yet, at the wake afterwards there was some healthy laughter as we remembered funny things this man had done and reminisced about the great times people had with him. Even though this crowd was grief-stricken by Adam's death, they were also able to celebrate his life and rejoice in the hope of the resurrection.

It's alright to be both happy and sad when someone dies. We needn't feel guilty for being happy that a person's suffering is over. Neither must we regret the grief we feel over separation. It is OK to feel both emotions at the same time, allowing a tension between the extremes of pain and peace to reside within our hearts.

We experience those extremes on this Sunday, but we experience them at other times as well. We call the day Jesus died Good Friday. It certainly wasn't good for Jesus. He had been betrayed by a friend and unjustly arrested the night before. His trial was a mockery of justice. He was brutally beaten and tortured. His tormentors crowned his head with thorns, mocked him, spat upon him and did everything they could to humiliate him. Then on this so-called Good Friday, they marched him up a hill, drove nails into his hands and feet to attach him to a cross and waited for him to die. There he hung in excruciating pain, abandoned by his friends and feeling forsaken by God. As terrible as it was for him, we can rejoice in it because it is the source of our salvation. Jesus died there to fully identify with us and so that we might live.

Imagine this scene. You are driving down a country road in early spring. Your car hits a patch of gravel and skids out of control. You careen over an embankment into the swirling waters of a raging river below. Water is coming into your car. You fumble with the seat belt but you can't get it unbuckled. Panic sets in because you know you are going to drown.

Suddenly a face appears at your car window. A man opens your car door, unbuckles your seat belt and pulls you safely to the surface. You both cling desperately to the roof of your vehicle as the rushing waters swirl around you. Without any warning a huge log slams into the head of your rescuer with a sickening thud and he is swept away. Help comes and you are saved. You are overjoyed to be alive, but you are also deeply saddened to learn that the body of the man who saved you has just been found downstream.

Such are the contrasting emotions of this day. We rejoice in our salvation, but we mourn the cost of it, for it cost Christ his life.

It is also a contrast we experience in everyday life. We experience it when we see our young people maturing and going their own way. It's an exciting time. It's a time you've been preparing your child for all of their lives. It is something you want for them, something that is best for them. And yet, it is a sad time too. You miss them with their dependence upon parents.

That mixture of emotions exists for parents when a child gets married. You are happy for them that they have found someone to love and someone who loves them. But you are also sad because now they aren't your little girl or your little boy anymore, they are someone else's spouse.

Very rarely in life, if ever do we experience a kind of purity of emotions. There seems to be something bittersweet about most things. A wedding day is described as the happiest day of your life and it may well be. But there may also be that lingering sadness over your favorite Grandparent or Uncle not living to share in it.

There is an old Chinese story about a poor farmer who had a single horse on which he depended for everything. He pulled the plough, drew the wagon, and was the old farmer's sole means of transportation. One day a bee stung the horse and in fright he ran off into the mountains. The old farmer went in search of him, but was unable to find him. He came home and his neighbors in the village came by and said, "***we are really sorry about your bad luck in losing your horse. But the old farmer shrugged and said, Bad luck, good luck - who is to say?***"

A week later the horse came back accompanied by 12 wild horses he had encountered. The farmer was able to corral all of these fine animals which turned out to be an unexpected windfall. Again news spread throughout the village, and his neighbors came and said, "***congratulations on your good luck, this bonanza out of the sky. To which the farmer once again shrugged said, Good luck, bad luck - who is to say?***"

The oldest son of the farmer decided to make the most of this good fortune. He started to break the wild horses so they could be sold and be put to work in the fields. As he attempted to do this, he got thrown off one of the horses and broke his leg in three places. When word of the accident spread throughout the village, again the neighbors came saying, "***we are sorry about the bad luck of your son getting hurt. The old man shrugged and said, Bad luck, good luck - who is to say?***"

Two weeks later a war broke out between the provinces of China. The army came through conscripting every able-bodied male under 50. Because the son was injured he did not have to go, and it turned out to save his life, for everyone from the village who was drafted was killed in the battle.

We can draw a couple of basic conclusions from this story. **First**, we humans