

Palm/Passion Sunday, Year B, Mar.29/15,
St. Mary & St. Tim., Sylvan Lake;
Liturgy of the Palms: Mk 11:1-11
Is. 50:4-9a; Ps. 31:9-16; Phil. 2:5-11; Mark 14:1- 15:47;

I haven't preached a sermon on Palm/Passion Sunday for years because the readings should speak for themselves, although hearing the Passion story all at once might take our breath away.

Holy Week, especially Good Friday, is the time when someone usually asks 'Why did Jesus have to die? He was such a good man.'

I have a book of Medieval Mystery Plays which are based on Bible stories and the ones about Jesus' passion and crucifixion focus on the gore and violence of the event. I often hear people speaking of Jesus' death as though the actual suffering he endured on the cross was what brought us the gift of salvation. I hope you noticed that Mark in his account mentions that Jesus was beaten and spat upon and then moves on without dwelling on that and when the soldiers and Jesus arrive at Golgotha it says 'they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them.'

That's important because it isn't the amount of pain that Jesus endured during his crucifixion that saves us. Many thousands of people were crucified by the Romans, and it is a terrible way to die, but all those thousands suffered at least as much pain as Jesus did, and we don't recognize any of those others as our Saviour, only Jesus. It is not his physical and mental suffering but his obedience to God's purpose for his life that makes salvation a reality.

We know from the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus was not eager to be crucified. He wrestled with himself and God and then chose to follow through on the ministry God called him to. Abba, Father, for you all things are possible, remove this cup from me, yet not what I want, but what you want.'

We need also to contemplate the fact that Jesus was left without support by his closest associates and friends, even when they were physically present. Mark tells us that they **all** drank the cup with Jesus

at the Last Supper, they **all** pledged to be loyal to death, and they **all** abandoned him. And in the end Jesus felt abandoned by God as well.

As soon as Jesus is arrested, he is no longer in control of his own person. He is handed over by Judas to the authorities and then he is acted upon by them. They direct where he goes and what happens to him. So he knows what it is to not be in control of his own life, which is something that everyone experiences at some time or another in different ways.

If Jesus had lived in any other period of time, including this time in which we live, he would have been killed for being faithful to God, because he tells us the truth about ourselves more clearly than we want to hear.

Jesus came to deliver humankind and the rest of creation from the power of Sin and Death, and to show us what someone has called 'the insanely generous love' of God for the whole creation. He remained faithful to that calling. We are called by God to do the same.

As Jesus said to his disciples in another context, the servant is not greater than the Master, the student is not greater than the Teacher. So, if faithfulness to God was required of the Master and the Teacher it is also required of those who are the servants and the students. And like Jesus we each have to choose to live in obedience to God knowing that the cost might be steep. Probably none of us here will be crucified but we see that Christians in other places in the world are being beheaded, shot, tortured, enslaved, when a short time ago, as history goes, those things were not happening in the places where they now are. There is no saying whether persecution will or will not come to Christians in Canada and in Central Alberta in the future.

But this we know, that because Jesus' died for his faithfulness to God, he was raised from the dead and is our Saviour and Lord.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.