April 13, 2014 – Palm Sunday

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As John Lennon wrote in his song, Beautiful Boy, “Life is What Happens to You While You’re Busy Making Other Plans.” I had all kinds of plans for this weekend. Michael and I were going to have our morning coffee while swinging in our new porch swing. Then I was going to go to my first meeting of the Commission on Ministry, to which the Bishop appointed me this year, and I was really excited about that. And I was going to write a great Palm Sunday sermon – maybe not as long as last year’s, but great nonetheless.

But none of that happened because Michael and I were both felled by a nasty stomach bug, starting Thursday night. So the great sermon had to go out the window, I’m afraid. I guess it happens to the best of us. Even Jesus’ disciples had WAY different plans for this week than how it turned out for them, and for him.

However, even before I got sick, I was thinking that the sermon for this most confusing of Sundays should be more about questions than answers anyway. So here are a few things to think about:

Today is the day we celebrate Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem…for awhile. Then the sunshine of this celebration is quickly blotted out by storm clouds as we turn to the Passion Gospel for the first time. Why do we do this to ourselves? We could just as easily stay with Palm Sunday for the whole day and leave the Passion for Good Friday, where it reappears anyway. And yet it has been the tradition of the Church nearly since the beginning. What does it mean that we celebrate triumph and tragedy in the same service?

As I said, this sermon is more about the questions than the answers. Here’s another one:

When we read the Passion narrative together and get to the part where we all shout “Crucify him!” I imagine you all feel as acutely uncomfortable saying that as I always do. I expect that that’s what was intended the first time it was conceived of to do the Passion Gospel in parts with the congregation taking the part of the crowd. But what does it make you feel individually? Do you think about it after the Gospel is done? What does it mean to come to the altar rail and receive the body and blood of Jesus after we’ve just yelled “Crucify him?” Along those lines, I want to read something that Michael wrote about this.

“Yes, we too are the ones shouting "CRUCIFY HIM!" But not merely in our sin – that's a cliche. When we show up for Christmas, but ignore the meaning of Advent... we shout "CRUCIFY HIM!" When we show up for Easter but skip Good Friday... we shout "CRUCIFY HIM!" When Lent is something we ignore and refuse to grapple with ... we shout "CRUCIFY HIM!"

When we can't even bother to show up one hour a week because of a golf game, or football, or we'd rather sleep in, or we just can't be bothered... we shout "CRUCIFY HIM!" When our cable TV bill, or our country club dues, or our wine bill, is larger than our donation to the Church... we shout "CRUCIFY HIM!" We crucify Him over and over again, not in our sin and depravity, but in our lassitude and apathy. Those are the wounds that pain Him the most greatly.”

So my question to you is this: what do we do every day that shouts, “Crucify him?”

And finally, let’s think about this Passion Sunday through the words we say every Sunday, but which might slip by without our noticing. “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Could there be any greater trespass than to turn on a friend? Judas did it. Peter did it. And now we do it. And yet, we are forgiven. We are washed in that very blood we are complicit in spilling and we are made clean. Jesus says, “Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.” But he was also saying, “Forgive them for they knew exactly what they were doing and did it anyway,” or, “Forgive them for they were too weak to follow the right path.” We are forgiven, and we renew that forgiveness every Sunday in the Eucharist.

So before we begin the prayers of the people, let’s take a few moments to think about these questions and the many more I didn’t mention, and to contemplate the very great gift we have been given and continue to receive in the Body and Blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Loving Lord and Savior, thank you for taking that ride today, even knowing where it would lead. Thank you for taking us along and showing us the way to the Cross, even knowing we won’t always follow you there. And thank you for forgiving us, time and time again, even as we shout “Crucify Him!” In your gracious Name we pray.

Amen.