

**BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES
IN THE NAME OF THE LORD**
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Palm Sunday 2013

The great challenge is that today's liturgy is an attempt to pack almost all of Holy Week into one service. Unpacking all of this is an impossible task so do not fear I will not try to explain it all in the next few minutes. This is why we have Holy Week.

We had a discussion at clericus about just doing Palm Sunday and forget the passion part. One rector commented "If you want to hear that story you have to come on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday." I found myself thinking that the problem with Holy week is that is about more than just hearing the story, it is about experiencing the story. The brothers of the Society of St. John have been doing a series on encountering Jesus through the writings of John. Holy Week is about encountering Jesus on a deep and powerful level. The early church understood this very well and the early church at the start of the period after Constantine is the source of the material for our Holy Week services. They understood the importance to our faith of actually encountering Jesus during Holy Week.

The services that were included in the Book of Common Prayer come from the time of Constantine. So even though this is our most recent prayer book, it actually contains some of the oldest services in the history of the church.

The records we have come from a pilgrim whose name was Egeria. She was a nun who recorded her experience of a pilgrimage for the Holy Week services that were located in Jerusalem. Holy Week in Jerusalem was designed as a teaching tool for the many new converts to Christianity. This was sort of a Vacation Bible School for adults if you will. Pilgrims to Jerusalem would re-enact the biblical story starting on Palm Sunday and moving to what is formally known as the Tridium, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and the Great Vigil of Easter, which began at sundown on Saturday and ended with the first Eucharist of Easter at sunrise. Pilgrims like Egeria took these traditions back to their own churches and the practice spread.

The pilgrims of Egeria's day experienced the story, they didn't just hear about it. That is why the liturgies of Holy Week are experiential. We actually wash feet, we strip the altar, we sit and pray at the foot of the cross on Good Friday. Ignatius knew the importance of experiencing the Gospel stories. In his Spiritual Exercises a person is asked to envision themselves in each of the stories and that is what I intend to do for this Holy Week in the course of our services. With each of these services I invite you to move into your heart and feel, experience not just hear. Ask yourself the questions, of what would it have been like to be there. What would I have done if I had been there? I would like to start that with the entrance into Jerusalem.

Often we give the entrance of Jesus little notice. I would like to change that this morning and focus on the passage we read during the Blessing of the Palms. I would like to take you through a brief Ignatian meditation on the entrance that will help fill in some details and allow you to experience this in a different way.

Put your feet on the floor and close your eyes. Imagine that you are in ancient Jerusalem, standing by the gate where you have heard Jesus will enter. This is opposite the gate that Herod and Pilate would use. This gate is the road from Bethany just outside the walls. The walls are massive and tower over you. What is the weather like. Is it hot cold, is the sun out. Take a breath and notice what you smell. Do you smell the people of the crowd, maybe smells of food or spices in the stalls along the street.

You hear shouting and singing in the distance. You notice that

Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

"Hosanna!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

You finally see him. It's Jesus. He's riding not on a horse, but on a donkey, a young one. He comes on a donkey meaning he comes in peace. What does he look like? See the people waving the branches. Feel the crush of the people around you. What are you feeling, thinking, hoping? Is this what you were expecting?

Look at Jesus really look at him. He looks over at you and you can see his face and look into his eyes. What is that like? At that moment is there something you want to say to him?

Thank Jesus for this chance to meet him and come back and open your eyes when you are ready.

This type of meditation can be done with any part of the Passion story that we just heard. As we go through this Holy Week I hope that you will come on Wednesday for the Stations of the Cross for families, Thursday to experience Maundy Thursday with the Agape Dinner, the foot washing and the story of the Eucharist. Friday with the church stripped bare to hear again the whole story and to sit at the foot of the cross and wonder how did we get here from the joyous entrance of today. Then you will truly have experienced Holy Week just like those in the early church. Then you will be ready to really celebrate on Easter with the Vigil on Saturday and services on Sunday morning.