

## ~From the Bishop

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,



It used to be that Palm Sunday was a day of celebration. The better part of the worship service was hosannas and palm branches waving. Children and Adults looked forward to this upbeat worship, especially after 40 days of somber,

penitential Lent. And the service acted as a sort of reprieve, before the intensity of Holy Week began.

But then, attendance during the Great Three Days began to decline. Maybe Holy Week was too intense for some. Maybe it was too sad. Maybe these three days somehow were no longer given the focus and attention due them as the central worship of our faith.



Whatever the reason, missing Holy Week meant that folks were experiencing the “happy happy joy joy” of Palm Sunday and then leaping over Holy Week to the “happy happy joy joy” of Easter Sunday. They would completely skip over death, and suffering, and sadness. They would miss the betrayal, the last supper, the crucifixion of Jesus.

And I guess, who can blame folks for wanting to avoid all that grim darkness. We would much rather celebrate and be joyful than sad and somber.

But worship that only considers the happy hosannas and the empty tomb misses the whole point of Christ on the cross and the sin of the world that put him there. There is value in looking at the death of Jesus, in pondering his suffering, and in dwelling on his last hours of life.

Because you know and I know that life is not all “happy happy joy joy.” To worship in Lent, and to dive in to Holy Week is to admit the truth to

ourselves, no matter how unpleasant – that life can be hard, and death can be harder. We live in the shadow and fear of death. We suffer. We sin. We die. And we need saving.

So I am glad that our Lutheran tradition dwells in the darkness, if only for a little while. It is good that our worship reflects the truth of life and the truth of our faith. Constant joy is not the way things are. And worship that only celebrates feeling good, soon seems hollow, no matter how upbeat the music.

So during Lent and Holy Week we take the time to consider the suffering and death of Jesus. During these 40 days, we sit in the knowledge of our sinfulness and consider our need for God.

And we take this time, not so that we feel condemned and sad, but because death is the only way to new life.

Jumping from Palm Sunday to Easter is like jumping from fall to spring with no winter. Fall and winter are necessary before spring can come. And Jesus must suffer death before he can rise again. There is no resurrection without the crucifixion. There is no rising without dying. Easter joy is real when we admit that death is real. We receive the freedom of forgiveness with relief and gladness if first we understand our need for God’s grace.

So Palm Sunday is now Passion Sunday and our hosannas quickly fade. During Holy Week, we will pause in Jesus’ final hours and give them their due. In our Lutheran tradition there is no escaping the sacrifice and death of Christ.

But then neither do we miss the new life of resurrection and the fullness of Easter joy... in this life, nor in the life to come.



~Yours in Christ,  
Bishop Katherine Finegan