

Rev Sally's Sermon
Palm Sunday
March 28, 2021

When I visited Jerusalem in 1993, I had the opportunity to walk the Via Delarosa, the path that Jesus took from Pilate's headquarters to Golgotha, the place of crucifixion. Along the way, we remembered how Jesus was condemned by Pilate, flogged, and mocked by the soldiers, stripped of his clothes and his dignity, and crucified along with bandits. Along the way I felt the hard stones on which Jesus was beaten. I heard the echoes of the crowds as they cried "Crucify him". I knelt at the altar in the chapel of the Crucifixion and placed my hand on the cold stone in which the cross stood. As I walked this path, I knew the suffering of my God.

It had begun almost a week earlier when Jesus had entered Jerusalem, to the cheers of the crowd. They had proclaimed him to be "The one who comes in the name of the Lord!" But by Thursday, the emotions of the crowd were swinging. The religious leaders felt threatened by Jesus and conspired to have him arrested. And in the early hours of Friday, they found Jesus with his disciples in a garden. There they arrested him and led him to a hasty trial before the religious leaders who condemned him as deserving death. But they had no power to execute this sentence, so they turned to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Again, a hasty trial was arranged, but Pilate could see through the religious leaders charade. He knew Jesus had done nothing to warrant death, but ultimately, out of political expediency, Pilate agreed to their request, ordering Jesus to be crucified. During his passion, Jesus suffered greatly. Betrayed and denied by his friends, condemned by the religious leaders, rejected by the crowds, judged by Pilate, scorned by the soldiers, nailed to a cross and then mocked for his suffering.

But in the midst of his suffering Jesus remained the faithful Son of God. He remained true to His Father. He did not deny his Father for the sake of saving himself from suffering. When Pilate asked, "Are you King of the Jews?" Jesus could have said, "Oh no, you have it wrong." But he did not deny who he belonged to.

This year we also have known great suffering. It's hard to believe it's been a year. We have all lived with the suffering caused by Covid 19. Some have lost loved ones; some have been sick themselves; some have had to work long hours in dangerous environments; and all of us have struggles with the limits of isolation. And if that wasn't enough our world seems to have gone crazy in the last year: racial prejudice,

political division, and just recently violent mass shootings in both Atlanta and Boulder. This year we have suffered greatly and continue to suffer.

But the good news of the incarnation is that Jesus knows our suffering. He has been here. He has experienced life among his people. He knows what it means to live what seems like a life out of control. He knows what it means to hurt. He knows what it means to feel alone. He knows what it means to feel abandoned. As he suffered on the cross, his mind went to Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

So, it is this incarnation that assures us that we are not alone in our suffering. Because Jesus knows our suffering firsthand, he is with us, beside us, no matter what we face. He shares my burdens; he feels my pain; he knows my fear. And because he knows where we stand, he is able to empower us to walk the path of life as faithful disciples, as faithful children of God. The Book of Hebrews reminds us that through Jesus, we will “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Over the last year I have experienced this mercy and grace. Sometimes in the midst of the struggle it’s been hard to see. But as I look back at my life over the past year, I do see God’s presence. I have experienced friends who have been present with me and have to listen to me when I have struggled with the pressure of hard decisions. I have experienced God’s mercy in the research that has been accomplished in the development of three vaccines and all the people who have been empowered to use their skill to develop these life-saving medications. I have also recently experienced God’s grace in Daisy, my adopted kitty, who has provided me with a loving presence at home. Through all of these and more, I know that Jesus is present with me in the midst of my struggles.

This is the good news of our Lord’s suffering. We are not alone. God is with us in all the conditions of life, even the very worst. And in the midst of suffering, the Lord God will provide the way forward, the way of Life.