

The Rev. James H. Littrell  
Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday  
April 2nd, 2023

It hardly seems so, but almost six weeks ago, as the days were just beginning to lengthen and the nights were still long and cold, we were invited into the observance of a Holy Lent. Most of you know those lines of invitation by heart: “I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church,’ the Priest intones,” to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance, by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word.”

How are we doing? How are you doing? Has this been, for us, for you, a Holy Lent? I can say, for me, that every day I spend with you, the St. Martin’s community, is a holy day. That doesn’t mean that every day is easy. Holiness is sometimes frustrating here, as it is everywhere. More often, though, my days are marked by a joy that emerges from deep discernment and prayer and meditation—whether that’s the endeavor of an entire community or a single child of God.

The tasks set before me as your Interim Rector—tasks of that investigate injury and work toward reconciliation, that try to identify dysfunction and offer at least the beginnings of correction, tasks that allow me access into those most precious of things, the secrets of your hearts, which you bring to me almost daily and in whose examination I am privileged to walk with you—all those things are holy work, and it feels to me like this has been a useful Lent in all those ways and more.

Last Wednesday, after a series of Wednesdays learning about the joy and new life being found in some of St. Martin’s many ministries—we ate and drank and sang out God’s joy together in an evening of profound affirmation and love, an evening that in its diversity and unalloyed laughter (and sometimes in tears, evoked by sheer beauty) looked like what St. Martin’s might be on its way to becoming, a powerful sign of God’s transformational love here and now, and into the future into which you are called.

For me, there are also the more mundane—meaning literally “worldly”—tasks: managing staff, revising leaflets, overseeing, imagining and developing programs, cleaning the kitchen, emptying trash, trying to model stewardship as much as I can by insisting that we try to recycle and compost, getting the staff and community to move away from a model of privilege in which every small wish is James Kent’s command...all that work in and of the world is also very much the Lenten project, or at least it has been for me.

One day last week, I watched over the space of maybe 30 minutes as perhaps a dozen people crossed the Terrace and driveway on the way to the Parish Hall, each person practically stepping on a couple of very visible pieces of trash. Not one stopped to pick up that trash. So last week, we had a little chat about this nonchalance in staff meeting. Some had not noticed the trash; others had not wanted to touch it. I think there was some chagrin; I hope there will be some reformation—and I do not exempt myself from that hope.

Let me invite you to join us in that parish work of stewardship: if you see something amiss, take action—and I pray do not, unless absolutely necessary, let that action be to call James Kent.

This is, I think, how the word repentance—which does not mean the about-face we are often told it means so much as an effort to correct our lives by small, intentional, habit-building acts of what are, finally, tokens of love—this is what repentance looks like. I'm hoping I can keep at it, and I hope you will too.

Now we arrive at the Sunday of the Passion, the Sunday we call Palm Sunday. Here we are, having heard the story of Jesus summoning a donkey (pity the one whose donkey that was and pray that it was returned to them whole, their livelihood restored!) to mount and head off in triumph, our palms and branches waving, our skirts and dresses strewn before the donkey-mounted Jesus, through Jerusalem's gates to inexorable, inevitable, horrible calamity.

The week he and we face into today is full of astonishing contrast; it's very much an exhibition of communal bipolarity. All the love and all the pain inherent in that love will be on display in the days ahead. And come Friday, after the great Maundy meal in which we first wash one another clean and then share an ancestral feast together—"do this in remembrance of me"—I hope you will come with me and pray a while in whatever place is holy for you: here in this sanctuary, in the Chapel, outside on a Columbarium wall or bench while communing with the the dead, in a quiet walk along the Wissahickon or through the springtime glory of the streets around us. For come good Friday, there is Jesus' death, horrible and unalloyed, your and my mortality displayed uncostumed, our mortality unavoidable.

That is where we will end this week. And that is where the Good News of Jesus leaves us today. At the end of this service, I invite you into that silence—the silence of mortality, and perhaps, as Whittier suggests, of eternity. Leave here today in that space and in that quiet. For a moment, leave life's busy-ness aside, let rest your need, all our need, to assuage one another with the latest news or tasty tale. Just be with one another as

the children of God you are: sinners of God's own redeeming, blessed creatures, of sorrow and of joy, of death and of hope.

Amen.