

Reflection: Palm Sunday
Palm Sunday, Year A
Matthew 26:14-27:66

Shelby Ochs Owen
Emmanuel, Staunton
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Palm Sunday is a topsy turvy day liturgically speaking. At the beginning of this morning we were singing joyful songs. We waved our palm branches in a palm parade, greeting people on the streets with happy voices. We joined with those 2000 years ago in Jerusalem who welcomed Jesus into the city, riding on a donkey, hailing him as king. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," "Hosanna in the highest."

But within minutes, the atmosphere has changed. We might say the scene has dissolved into a train wreck with intrigue, betrayal, denial, desertion, suicide, a travesty of justice, and a mockery of the Divine. Things fall apart. Judas hands Jesus over for 30 pieces of silver; the rest of the so-called disciples forget who they are for a minute and they flee the scene; Peter denies Jesus three times; the chief priests and religious elders move in for the kill, Pilate flirts with acting justly but fails in the end, the fickle crowd turns vicious, the soldiers mock and spit on Jesus and they crucify him. Even the two bandits crucified with Jesus in Matthew's Gospel taunt him. All hell has broken loose. Creation's response to the scene is that darkness comes over the whole land, the earth shakes and rocks split.

And yet, there are a few alternate voices that stand out in today's story: What about Pilate's wife, who says to her husband, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." What about the centurion who guards Jesus' tomb declaring, "Truly this man was God's Son?" And what about the women who faithfully look on from a distance and Joseph of Arimathea who faithfully took Jesus' body to be properly buried in the tomb?

And what about Jesus himself? His last words here, "Eli, Eli lema sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" and soon thereafter breathes his last breath.

This passion narrative is the story of Jesus' suffering and death. Yes, it is Jesus' story but it is your story and my story, too. Where are you in it today? Are you ready to give up on God, quick to deny God's presence when life isn't going the way you think it should? Will you falter when peer pressure suggests your faith isn't worth much? Or, like the alternate voices in the story, will you hold steady, keeping your eyes on Jesus, recognizing his divine goodness even when things are going haywire. Will we wait patiently? Wait and watch. Yes, right now, in this story from Matthew's Gospel and maybe in some part of your own life, we are witnessing a train wreck. But we have something important to remember...

The story's not over yet.