

PALM SUNDAY

Matthew 21:1-10; Matthew 27:1-2,11-50; Isaiah 53:4-12

From the beginning of time our names have been written on the heart of God. Our lives have been etched in the palms of his hands.

There is, what appears to be, a great contradiction in what we, like countless thousands, indeed millions of Christian churches, are doing today. We are celebrating how Jesus came riding into Jerusalem and was acclaimed by the common people as the Messiah, and we are ourselves acclaiming him as our Messiah and our Lord in the same manner. And then we are telling the story of how the common people, the same crowd that welcomed Him in the streets of the Holy City, called for his death just a few days later, for a death plotted by the rulers of the temple and by the religious leaders of the nation into which he was born. It's just a little crazy to see the signs of welcome, the signs of approval, the signs of the prayer, "Lord, save us now" "Hosanna in the Highest" scattered all around us, and to be confronted in how some of these signs of welcome have been woven together by the sign of rejection, the sign of disgrace, the sign of torture, the sign of death.

There are many things that happen to us and that happen in the lives of others, that seem just a little bit, and maybe even a large bit, crazy. The graduating student who rejoices one night and is dead before the next morning, the victim of a drunk driver. The newly joined couple torn apart on the first night of their

marriage by a suicide bomber. Close to 25% of the children in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, living in poverty.

More than enough food produced each year to feed the entire world's population and millions dying of starvation while millions die from over-eating. All these are signs of great contradiction, great craziness.

Jesus knew as he was entered Jerusalem to the welcoming shouts and prayers of his people, that he would be rejected and killed within the week. He knew it, because from the beginning of time his death was written upon the heart of God, it was written upon God's heart from even before Eve reached for the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was written before Isaiah spoke of the one who would be despised and rejected by humankind, it was written before Mary conceived and the word was made flesh by the power of God's Spirit, indeed, it was written before our lives were etched on the palms of his hands as they stretched out upon the cross.

Jesus knew as his people called out to him for salvation on Palm Sunday, that they would also call out for his death within the week and that despised and rejected he would suffer death upon the cross, he knew, he knew from the very beginning, and he gave himself over to that death anyway; he knew, he knew from the very beginning, and he gave himself over to that death, because he knew.

The contradictions and the craziness in our world, those contradictions and that craziness that we experience in our workplaces and in our homes, and which we encounter in our neighbours, and see in our relatives, and indeed within our own selves, are the result of the sin of humankind, the result of self-seeking pride and self-serving acts, the result of desiring privilege without responsibility, honour without humility, profit

without work, power without accountability, and pleasure without having to love or to share.

Jesus knew this truth from his mother's knee, and from the teachings of the law and the prophets and from the heart of God disclosed to him as he prayed, the heart of God shown him by the Spirit. Jesus knew that sin was the enemy, and that because of sin, the people God had made would sing songs to him one day, and call for his death the next.

The craziness, the contradictions, the sin that darkens and destroys all that it encounters, is ours. And God the all knowing, knew it would be so from the beginning. And God knew what the remedy, the only remedy could be, if he was to make us at all, if he was to make us to be like himself, if he was to make us free and powerful, creative and loving.

From the beginning of time the death of Christ Jesus was written upon the heart of God, because from the beginning of time our names have been written on the heart of God, and because from the beginning of time, God has wanted us to live rather than to die, God has wanted us to be, rather than to not be.

The apostle John tells us the meaning of the Passion Story when he says: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life". The glory of Jesus, the glory of God, is found in how God has entered into our contradictions and our craziness and taken upon himself the death that should be ours. The glory of God, the glory of Jesus, is how he is raised on a cross before he is raised from the dead. That can be a hard one for us to grasp. A hard one for us to accept.

We don't like to think about death, especially our own and insofar as Jesus died upon the cross for us, we like to remember the briefness of his suffering and to focus our attention on how

the stone was rolled away from the tomb three days later, rather than upon how his hands were pierced by the nails and his side pierced by a spear and how he called out in agony as he breathed his last.

The story of the Passion of Jesus has never been intended to be a pretty story, one to amuse us as it were. Rather it has been told through the centuries to focus our attention on what his death was all about, on what it was for, and on who it was for. It was for people like us, people who are more than able to acclaim Jesus their Lord and King one day and call for his death the next. That is pretty amazing and should call us to the deepest and most profound kind of celebrating, and to humility and to godliness.

AMEN.