

3.28.21 Passion Sunday The Unkingly, Son of God

- I love a parade
 - When I was young, our town had a parade every year in the month of May to celebrate the blooming of the dogwood trees
 - And the dogwood parade had everything
 - It had marching bands, it had convertibles with waving politicians, it had a Dogwood Queen and her court... and because there was a National Guard armory nearby, the parade had jeeps, and trucks, and even artillery
 - As a young boy I was impressed!
 - And as a teenager, I marched in the parade in the band
- Parades are supposed to be impressive, otherwise, why would you even think of having one?
- It was the same in Jesus's day
 - Because the Jewish festival of Passover celebrated God's liberation of Abraham and Sarah's descendants from slavery in Egypt centuries earlier, the celebration of Passover in Jerusalem in Jesus day while living under the thumb of Roman rulers, made the holiday a time that was ripe for protests and even rebellion
 - So before each Passover, the Romans would put on a parade
 - The Roman soldiers would march with swords and spears flashing
 - The Roman chariots, the jeeps of the day, would roll through the streets
 - And the Roman commanders and Roman officials would ride on great horses
 - All this was meant to show the impressive strength of Rome that had conquered, and for decades had occupied Israel, and to remind the Jews who was boss
 - The annual parade was a Passover warning – if you dared to protest, or if you tried to incite a rebellion during the celebration, the might of Rome would squash you like a bug
- But then a few days before the Passover, an impromptu parade was held to welcome Jesus

- No legions of soldiers
- No government leaders
- Just a guy riding on a ridiculous donkey, with peasants waving palm branches and praising him as a king
- Surely Rome was puzzled, because this guy, this Jesus was not like any Roman ruler – he made an absolutely UNKINGLY entrance, although some of the people hailed him as king and Messiah, so maybe there would be trouble during Passover after all
- And then in the long reading of the gospel story, the rest of the week unfolded
 - Jesus was betrayed by a follower and abandoned by friends, Jesus was arrested, and when a crowd of people was asked whether they wanted either Jesus or an actual insurrectionist named Barabbas to be released, they chose Barabbas, leading to Jesus' crucifixion
 - The inscription on Jesus' cross read THE KING OF THE JEWS, but by then, those were words of mockery because all of his followers were gone
 - And alone, except for two thieves who were crucified with him, Jesus died utterly forsaken
 - But at the death of this unlikely-looking king, an unexpected voice spoke up. The centurion, the Roman officer in charge of execution, the one who was neither a disciple nor a believer, spoke the word of truth: TRULY THIS MAN WAS GOD'S SON [Mark 15:39]
- We gather here for a day that begins with the waving of palms and ends on the cross, while we are more than a full year into a pandemic, so many of US also feel alone and abandoned.
 - Friends and family have gone unseen, unless on Zoom
 - Birthdays and anniversaries have been celebrated alone
 - Even funerals have been held with only closest family at the graveside
 - But now on this Sunday when we remember that Jesus went from a parade of palms to the loneliest place on the cross, we need to remember that TODAY is not the end of the story
- The abandonment of Jesus, the death of Jesus, does not get the last word. Jesus, the unlikely-looking God, would soon be raised

- The tomb would soon be emptied
- Sin and death would soon be conquered by Christ alone
- Forgiveness and life would soon be shared with us by no one other than Christ crucified and raised
- And that gift of forgiveness and life is not just a future promise for us, THAT gift of forgiveness and life IS A PROMISE NOW THAT WE CAN HOLD ONTO even through a pandemic
- And let that promise of our unlikely-looking king remind us, let it reassure us, let it give us hope, that despite the ongoing grind of this pandemic, that God has not and never will abandoned us to a virus, and even more importantly God has not and will abandon us to sin and death.