



**Palm Sunday, Year C – March 28, 2010**

**An Exhortation by the Rev'd Canon M. Ansley Tucker**

There is elation in the air. It has been a “good day” for Jesus – the Crowds adored him! They made him a carpet of palms, practically acclaimed him the very emissary of God: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

But how quickly we will exchange our palms for scourges, our adulation for contempt, and our accolades for denunciation. Even before this humble king has passed out of our sight, the throng will become a mob — a howling, manic, bloodthirsty mob. And yet, what else did Jesus expect? He knew he was a wanted man; and this little caper with the donkey wasn't exactly the most prudent means of entering the city. From the point of view of the authorities, it must have seemed positively inflammatory. You can't expect them to sit idly by while Jesus has practically convened a press conference in his own honour! Of *course* they are provoked to action! What else did Jesus expect?

Only this, and it is this I dare to ask of you in his name, that his friends would have stuck around long enough to see what happened next. It isn't as if he wanted them to intervene, for what was about to happen *had* to happen, but would it have been too much to hope for some friendly company? Today begins the week-long journey to The Place of the Skull. And all Jesus had hoped, and all I ask, is that he not have to go it alone.

Because the thing is, it would be so much easier, and so much *nicer*, just to go home, and come back next week to see how he made out. But here is the rub. This week has eight days, not two. It is an octave. You can play the bottom note today, and the top note next Sunday, and it will sound well enough, even complete; but the problem is, all the music is in the middle. We spend the whole year sounding the tonic. We even say, Every Sunday is a little Easter. This is the week we immerse ourselves in the scale; this is week we take the time to hear the whole symphony; this is the week we remind ourselves how God managed to redeem the jumble in the middle, and get us back to home key.

Somehow, reading the program notes is a poor substitute for being there. You can take your seat just before the fourth movement, and even enjoy it, but you'll never know how brilliant a resolution it really was. Nothing beats giving ourselves totally to the experience. And this is difficult for us. Richard Holloway points out, rightly I think, that we are an essentially voyeuristic society — which is to say, willing to engage with the object of our affections at arm's length only — and that as a result, we have lost touch with our interior landscape; we have lost touch with the very heart of God. His point is that we will never satisfy the spiritual hunger that gnaws at our souls, apart from surrendering to the Mystery that it may ravish us; apart from “getting into it”.

But the danger is not on our side only. For it is precisely this kind of detached, disinterested, profoundly bored, religiosity which saps the very life from Christianity, and sets Christ once again on a gibbet to die. One is put in mind of a bit of rhyme from the pen of Woodbine Willie:

*When Jesus came to Birmingham,  
they simply passed him by;*

*they never hurt a hair of him;  
they only let him die.*

It was in perhaps the same vein that Charles Raven once said of war, "Those who can live in it may be purified; those who look on are usually defiled."

We are called, this week, our Week of Weeks, to live *in* the passion of Jesus Christ.

There is one other thing. The death of Jesus was wrought by sin for the forgiveness of sin. It would thus be travesty for us to present ourselves at the Easter altar, to participate in "the benefits of his passion", without regard to whatever sins or resentments continue to lurk in our own hearts. This is also a week for the restoration of the penitents, for forgiveness, and for forgiveness.

For most it will be enough to open one's grief to a kind and understanding God in the secrecy of one's own heart, or in the safety of the gathered community making confession generally. But not all can quiet their conscience in this way; not all feel the liberation from the power of sin for which they long. For such as these I remind you that our tradition does provide a formal rite for the reconciliation of a penitent, which is available to any who ask. The Anglican rule about sacramental confession is that "All may. None must. Some should." There are several clergy, both here and in nearby parishes, who have experience in this ministry, and who will happily explain it to anyone wanting to know more. The point is that no one needs to bear an unresolved burden of guilt. That is what the "music in the middle" was all about.

Music which even now has begun. My brothers and sisters, I call upon you in the name of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, to listen with all your heart and soul.