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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church - Roanoke, VA

Sunday of the Passion/Palm Sunday - Year B

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philemon 2:5-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

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Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from the one who comes in the name of the Lord, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Palm Sunday is an incredibly dynamic Sunday. We may remember it most prominently by the waving of Palm branches, processions into our churches. We may read the Gospel in parts to tell the story of Jesus' Passion and how those eventful moments unfolded before the world. Movement, is something so powerful on Palm Sunday. The memories, actions, and events that this Sunday hold are powerful. And we cannot deny the movement this Sunday provides as we move from our Lenten journey into the three days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and hope-filled Vigil. There is a powerful dynamic to this Sunday. A Dynamic so powerful that by simply saying Palm, we may get the image of today.

The most prominent memory I have of Palm Sunday was during my time as a missionary in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The week before Palm Sunday, my pastor-supervisor asked me to get the branches for Palm Sunday. Of course, I was confused by this request. I thought Palm branches came in a box from a liturgy supplies store, ordered weeks in advance.

He then proceeded to show me a saw and a bucket and ushered me towards a tree that stood in the front garden of the congregation. I then understood what he meant. He wanted me to saw off branches from this olive tree, place them in the bucket, and then hand them out on Palm Sunday as people arrived at the church.

So that week, I took my saw, held my bucket, and ushered myself to that tree to prepare for Palm Sunday. As I was sawing the branches off, I thought, well this certainly doesn't look like Palm Sunday. These aren't even palm branches.

As I finished my work, I looked back at the Tree. There before me stood a broken tree, branches hacked off, the tree's very identity not conforming to my Palm Sunday standard, and yet from that tree came the very branches and arms of celebration that awaited Jesus on Palm Sunday. That image gave me the most powerful dynamic image of Palm Sunday - Brokenness.

Brokenness - that's what defines Palm Sunday. Brokenness found in today's Gospel as a woman is criticized for her devotion and ministry.

Brokenness - Brokenness found in a disciple's corruption and greed.

Brokenness - Brokenness found in the disciple's desertion of their friend.

Brokenness - Brokenness found in Peter's unwillingness to be confident in his vulnerability. Peter's unwillingness to confess what he had so passionately confessed before - Jesus, the Savior of the broken.

Brokenness - brokenness found in all of us as we the disciples of Jesus fail to acknowledge the broken trees that we ourselves have hacked, cut, and dismembered. The wounds inflicted through racism, sexism, identity-removing practices, and greed.

Yes, the Body of Christ is broken. And we need a dynamic movement to pull us back together. We need an ever-present person, purpose, and place to feel whole.

Well, that person, purpose, and place stand ready.

It is a garden that welcomes us into a congregation of Passiontide people. People that even, as the branches of celebration were distributed and waved to an adoring congregation, even as shouts of Hosanna and blessed is the one are proclaimed, even amidst all of that, our actions are in the presence of a tree that is as broke as people themselves. A place that stands ready to welcome the brokenness.

We process into that congregation with a purpose. A purpose that stands ready and eager to proclaim the impending passion. A congregation of people ready to witness three days of service, sacrifice, sin, and salvation. To find ourselves as afraid and uncertain as Mary Magdalene and our fore-mothers of faith found themselves at the tomb.

We need a person. A person whose place and purpose is our salvation. A Sovereign and Savior who will find himself and broken. Yet, at the same time a

person who could never find himself truly beaten. For Christ's saving actions today find himself dead on a broken tree and placed in a tomb. The brokenness of today is indeed found in the branches of a broken tree. Yet, today remains a Sunday, and even amid the brokenness of the Palms and the branches, the Sunday continues to give us hope for what awaits us through the movement of this week. A Christ whose promise of new life is revealed to the broken. Thanks be to God. Amen.