

## Palm/Passion Sunday

### Cleaning House

Isaiah 50: 4-9a; Mark 11:15-19

Several years ago churches began changing the name of Palm Sunday to Palm/Passion Sunday. Now, the service begins with the Palms but ends with the passion – the crucifixion.

The reason for this change is because, if you miss Holy Thursday and Good Friday services, you go from the glory of the Palms to the glory of Easter without a hint of the agony in between.

So, while we began the service today with Palms and praise, we will end it with the story of the cross and the choir singing “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

What this change in our Palm Sunday service does is to highlight the amazing contrast between Palm Sunday and Good Friday.

On Palm Sunday, the crowd is shouting “Hosannas.” On Friday they are shouting “Crucify Him.”

One day Jesus has an approval rating of, say, 80; the next day it is down to 3, one of whom is his mother. What happened?

Well, Jesus didn’t live up to the Palm Sunday crowd’s expectations. The Palm Sunday people expected Jesus to overthrow the oppressive Roman government.

Instead of overthrowing Rome, Jesus went to the Temple, of all places, and turned over the tables of the moneychangers.

Jesus- the master of the teachable moment – uses this moment when all eyes were watching to turn over tables in church.

The point is that our political problems aren’t really the heart of our problems. Our economic problems aren’t really the heart of our problems. The real problem is our spiritual and moral condition.

Church is more important than we think. Church is more important than they, out there, think.

No nation or culture will be more moral or compassionate than its houses of worship.

If 11 o’clock Sunday morning remains the most segregated hour in a nation, don’t be surprised when there is no political will to practice affirmative action.

If churches are more concerned about how to swell their endowments than hungry people sleeping on their doorsteps, than don’t be surprised by Enron.

If a church covers up the moral abuses of its priests, don’t be surprised when abusive relationships explode throughout the households of a society.

If God's people spend only a few cents out of every dollar we give for global ministry then don't expect the nation to care much whether people in Africa are dying from AIDS or people in Iraq are collateral damage.

The United Methodist Church is cutting staff and closing global ministries because we have been financing our mission on the back of our parents' and grandparents' commitment. We today have stopped being generous in our support of global ministry so it was funded from endowments donated by our parents and grandparents. When the stock market sank, we didn't have the money to continue global ministry, so mission hospitals and schools are suffering.

There are wars our grandchildren will die fighting in that the church of Jesus Christ could prevent today if we were building hospitals and schools in places where people are hungry and uneducated today. My friend Jim Knowles-Tuell likes to tell this story: Everybody expected bloodshed when apartheid ended in South Africa. It was reasonable to expect bloodshed, but it didn't happen. The person, more than anyone else, who was responsible for this peaceful revolution was Nelson Mandela. When reporters asked him why he didn't call for vengeance and retribution, he answered, "Because I wasn't raised that way."

Nelson Mandela was raised in a Methodist mission school. Our predecessors in the Methodist Church send teachers and money to South Africa and provided a school where Nelson Mandela learned the values that made possible a peaceful revolution in South Africa.

There are wars our grandchildren and grandnephews and grandnieces will be called to fight because of what the church of Jesus Christ ... because of what the United Methodist Church ... is not doing today. Because of schools and hospitals we are not building today.

A nation's houses of worship shape its moral and spiritual character. Reform a political party and you can change a decade. Reform a nation and you can change a generation. Reform a religion and you can change an age.

So instead of overthrowing the political oppressors, Jesus turned over table in church. Jesus cleaned his own house. And the bishops and senior ministers and councils were so threatened that they arranged his death.

We in the church have been pointing our fingers at presidents and governments a lot lately. My prayer this Palm/Passion Sunday is for America's churches, synagogues, mosques and meetings. May we truly be houses of prayer for the peoples of all nations. May we clean our own houses. This is what will end oppression and war and corruption and poverty and crass commercialism ... when the church starts being the church.