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“Welcome to Holy Week”

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Welcome to Holy Week

This week we will celebrate Maundy Thursday - “Maundy” coming from the Latin term *mandatum* meaning “command” where we recall Jesus’ command to love and serve each other

We’ll celebrate Good Friday and I often feel like the “good” should be in quotation marks – the day we remember Jesus’ crucifixion and death on the cross

The Easter Vigil, during which we’ll hear the stories of God’s promises from Genesis all the way to Jesus

And then Resurrection Sunday, Easter – the day Jesus rose from the dead

But we start here, today is “Palm/Passion” Sunday – where we recall Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem as well as his betrayal, trial, and execution – I think it should be called “Whiplash Sunday”

Our day starts with “Hosannah!” and ends with “Crucify him!” – a triumphant entry followed by a condemnation – a celebration of Jesus the King of Kings immediately followed by mocking and sarcastic “hail the King of the Judeans”

Whiplash feels like the appropriate term

All of us who have been journeying with Jesus thus far find our journey energized at Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem followed by this haltingly stark trial and dead end

As faithful disciples of Jesus, we can’t be shocked by this result, in fact it must make some sense

When you have a teacher and friend who comes to earth, who is claimed by God at his baptism as God’s beloved child, and then that friend finds ways to upend systems, radicalize the marginalized, and claim a religious superiority in interpretation of God’s intentions and promises over the religious leaders of the time, we know it’s going to ruffle some feathers

But still, how do we manage the whiplash – how do we cope with the pendulum swing of emotions from triumph to disaster?

The thing is, as your priest and pastor, I know that many of you are masters of this whiplash

Conversations like: “yes, my loved one died, it was too soon and I’m going to miss them terribly, but did I tell you my daughter moved back home and is living not far away?”

or, “I just don’t know how to talk to my family and friends about these hard subjects without getting really upset – we just don’t know how to talk to each other these days. Did you see the crocuses punching through? Spring is coming!”

“the diagnosis is cancer. I’ll need many more tests, and I’ll start treatment right away. But, that’s enough about me, how are you and your family?”

Have you ever had conversations like this with those you love? Have you ever been the one talking in conversations like these?

In Jesus’ story, we seemed to undergo the “triumph to trial” whiplash, and in many conversations with those we love it tends to be the “trial to triumph” whiplash but the effect is the same: whiplash

In some instances, I think the “trial to triumph” whiplash is a result of not wanting to burden others with the difficulties we face – sometimes it’s also a fear of vulnerability of trusting others with our trials, we don’t want to be a downer or a bother

In other instances, the “trial to triumph” whiplash is an expression of honesty and reality: my loved one *did* die which makes me sad, *and* my daughter *did* move home and it fills me with joy; it is hard to talk with loved ones about hard topics, *and* the crocuses *are* blooming; I’ve been diagnosed with cancer, *and* I care so much about you and your family and I want to know how you’re doing

This latter understanding of whiplash to me resonates with the whiplash we experience from Jesus: Jesus is the triumphant King of Kings, and Jesus is the condemned King of the Judeans; Jesus is the celebrated one, and the mocked one; Jesus is the one alive, and Jesus is the one who died on the cross.

The blessing of this whiplash is the recognition that Jesus is not just on one side of the whiplash equation: Jesus isn’t only in the triumph and Jesus isn’t only in the trial, Jesus is in both.

Jesus is present in the grief we experience at the loss of a loved one, and Jesus is present in the joy and elation we feel at another loved one moving home

Both our struggle to discuss hard topics with our friends and the emergence of spring flowers have the stamp of the Divine

When we receive difficult diagnoses and when we inquire about the lives and livelihoods of our dear friends, we are held in the everlasting care of the Holy Spirit.

Our lives are filled with whiplash, sometimes more significantly than others

Even when we're experiencing our greatest triumph, a trial might sneak in

And, definitely when we're experiencing our greatest trial, a triumph isn't far away

For me, one of the greatest lessons of Palm/Passion Sunday is God's capacity to hold Jesus' triumph and his trial and make them both holy, and in doing so, God's capacity to hold our triumphs and our trials and make them both holy

Thanks be to God, Amen.