

Palm Sunday-Year B-The Rev. Jennifer B. Cleveland 3.24.24

Yesterday, nine people and one dog met at the Trustland Trails parking lot off of Craw Road for a rainy walk and roll of the ADA trail. It was billed as a Holy Hike, the official name of the four-times-a-year hikes that St. Augustine's and several other churches across the Diocese are organizing on the Saturdays closest to the solstices and equinoxes. So this was the Spring Equinox Holy Hike offered by St. Augustine's. There is no prescription for what a Holy Hike needs to include, how long it needs to be, or where it must take place. What makes it a Holy Hike is that it is done with intention, to connect people with creation, to pay attention to the ways the *world is charged with the grandeur of God*, as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote. There were very few goals this first time out other than to make it welcoming to *all* people and to walk a trail also open to dogs. The plan was to do the loop three times—a trinitarian number, with stops along the way like the Stations of the Cross we'll do later this week, we walked a ways and then stopped along the trail—to pause, listen, look, breathe, smell, notice, and feel the air—guided by prayers, scripture, poetry, a softly sung chant, silence. Walking and rolling together, alert to what we were seeing and our own internal experience. The rain held steady for three full loops. Perhaps it helped with the awakening: a holy shower of rain in the midst of the forest filled with so many shades of green.

Palm Sunday and all of Holy Week are much like that Holy Hike with stops along the way. In fact, I might call it our annual Holy Hike through our central story as Christians and we've already begun. The physical distance we just traversed between Campbell Hall (Belltower) is not long; it added just a few extra steps to our day, but so much has already happened. We're not play-acting or trying to re-enact the gospel, although it sometimes feels that way. It's awkward to shout "Hosanna" and yell "Crucify"—neither of those are words we tend to use in our normal, everyday lives—but that's part of the pausing and doing things a little bit differently. To have all of our senses awakened to Jesus and to the Holy movement all around us and in us all the time.

Our first stop on this Holy Walk began with shouts of joy and blessing from the crowd that wanted to see Jesus, to pay attention to him. They followed him every step of the way into the city, reminiscent of those events where there is clapping and stomping and craning of the neck because you don't want to miss anything—graduations, parades, processions—those events that are etched in our memories because there was so much happening and so much emotion and everyone is all-in, cheering together. What did or do you notice about that first stop?

The second stop is a little more subtle. It is that in-between time, when the parade is over and Jesus enters the temple, looks around, and then goes off with his twelve good friends. Have you ever been one of the last ones to leave a big event venue? Everyone has mostly gone and all that is left is the debris. It's so empty and quiet. All that's left are the overflowing trash cans. The streets littered with food scraps, flattened paper cups, placards or signs that people were enthusiastically waving but have now left behind. In our Palm Sunday narrative, I think about our palms that we were waving just a few short moments ago. How quickly we put them down and wonder what we are supposed to do

with them, now that the procession is over. (You can take them home and bring them back next year, just before Ash Wednesday, to be burned for ashes.)

And then we come to the Passion of Jesus according to Mark. This third stop is our focal point. There is so much going on here and so many people to watch and listen to here. There is so much to see and pay attention to. Instead of the air being filled with hosannas and joyous shouts of blessing for the coming of the kingdom, the air is filled with derision, taunting, and mocking. The violence escalates. It's an ugly scene—a hard place to linger because what happens here is all-too familiar to what we see and notice in our own midst. Those roots of violence and hopelessness cling and clutch so tenaciously around us, but also within us. We've traversed a long way on this Holy Hike, from one extreme to the other. From closely following Jesus to that moment when he is alone, even though the crowd is still there. Even God appears to have abandoned him. Who or what stands out to you this year at this stop?

And there is still one more stop this morning. When Joseph boldly asks for Jesus' body, tenderly prepares it for burial and lays it in the tomb. We're not the only ones watching here. Mary Magdalene and Mary are completely still, paying close attention as the stone is rolled in front of the tomb.

This Holy Hike that we began today has more stops before next Sunday. Love beckons each of us to enter into Holy Week, to go on this Holy Hike together. At each stop, each pause, pay attention and keep asking, "What am I noticing this time?" This noticing is the beginning of awareness of where you yearn for resurrection.