

“Palms. Palms. Only a dollar. Get your palms here.”

Street vendors called out to the pilgrims who had gathered at the top of the Mount of Olives. Having spent my last two dollars in cash on the poster of the Old City that is on the wall in the education room downstairs, I passed on the palms.

I remember that the path, paved with stones, was slippery. My rubber-soled walking shoes weren't helping at all. We were going downhill, into and across the Kidron Valley. It felt treacherous. I stopped at the side of the road to rest – downhill directions, whether on a path or on steps, - have always been harder for me to traverse. Maybe it's the bifocals? I'm not sure.

From my resting place I looked up to where I'd been. Making its way down the steep path was an entire tour group. To a person they were waving palms. “There is a very happy vendor at the top of the hill today,” I thought. As they passed, I heard them saying “Hosanna, Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” On one hand, I thought to myself, “what a crazy quirky bunch!”

On the other hand, I realized that I was concentrating so hard on not falling and rolling into the Kidron Valley that I was losing the significance of where I was and what happened here.

Jesus walked on this path many times going back and forth to his friends' house in Bethany. It was a regular thoroughfare for commerce going in and out of the city. Twice, the journey would be memorable....and for distinct reasons.

Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan posit that the Roman citizenry were lined up to the west of the city, ready to witness the newest battalion of soldiers marching into Jerusalem, headed by the governor Pontius Pilate. To the east, the followers of Jesus declare their allegiance to him with a parade of their own. In between, the authorities of both sides waited for the clash that certainly would come. But, it didn't come – that day anyway. There wasn't enough evidence to arrest him.

Yet.

In the ensuing week, Mark's gospel tells us that Jesus would have cursed a fig tree, cleansed the temple, and threatened the power structure with parables of wicked tenants and paying taxes. He declared that there was only one commandment. He shamed the authorities by pointing out their discriminatory tax system and finally, Jesus foretold the destruction of the Temple. However, it wouldn't be until Thursday night, as Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, that the High Priests would have a legitimate reason for an arrest: Thank you Judas.

That night, Jesus would go down that path one last time. He would spend the night in a carved-out hole in the governor's palace, lowered there by a rope around his wrists. It would be a dark, and very lonely night. With very little sleep. With very little hope.

I find myself thinking about Jesus' last walk through the Kidron Valley. The Valley of the Shadow of Death. It occurs to me that Jesus continues to walk through this valley. He walks along with us as we face illness or persecution. He walks with us when we march against violence and compassion-less leadership. He walks with us in danger.

It was Jesus who was attacked with fire hoses and dogs in Selma. He walks with our armed services personnel as they serve at home and abroad at the risk of their lives. He cowers in the hallways of our schools and universities.

He keeps company with people who are imprisoned or killed because of their actions or due to the bias and prejudice of others.

And like this tortured walk toward Jerusalem, Jesus continues to be crucified in order that those in power might keep their power. We witness it every day.

This week, I'm invited – as are all of you – to walk this path with Jesus once again.

Today, we wave our palms and shout Hosanna – Save Us! Before we leave in silence today, the passion narrative will be in our collective memory. This service is just the beginning of a week where we travel with Jesus.

I invite you, in the Name of the Church, to make this walk. Do as much as you can. If you are unable to be here, be a part of us wherever you are through reading, meditation, and prayer. You could watch a movie! I suggest Clint Eastwood's *Gran Torino*.

However you choose to do this, and I hope I see you here this week, contemplate the mighty acts done this week for you. Contemplate how you will respond to God's extravagant gift of salvation.

Amen.