

# JUST SHOW UP

The Reverend Peter F. Walsh  
April 17, 2011, Palm Sunday

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in your sight O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

## **No Response**

Did you notice the little rubric at the end of the Passion Narrative that says, "There is no response at the end of the Passion Gospel"? I love this rubric. It gives liturgical instructions. It also is like a Zen koen, a spiritual saying whose purpose is to stir contemplation.

## **How Are We to Respond?**

It points towards the truth that there is no adequate response to the Passion, and it raises the question, how are we to respond to the Passion? This morning we followed it with a lamentation, a sung sorrow, a heart poured out in grief over the death of a loved one.

But what about after the lamentation is over? How are we to respond? Perhaps the rubric should say, "There is no easy response to the Passion Gospel."

## **Understanding**

Christians have been trying to figure out how to respond to the Passion Gospel for two millennia. St. Paul put a lot of time into this. What went wrong? Why did the

greatest human being of all time get killed in such an ugly way? What does it all mean? What is the way of the cross? What does it reveal of God? What does it say about humanity? What does it call us to do? What is our cross? How does the way of the cross become the way of life? These are questions and mysteries that take a lifetime to answer. It is hard to respond because it is all too big.

## **Too Big: Niagara Falls**

The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday is simply too big. I once heard a meditation by Thomas Shaw, the Bishop of Massachusetts. I believe he quoted the poet Mary Oliver who said something like, 'Trying to understand the story of the Passion is like standing at the foot of Niagara Falls with an empty cup in your hand hoping to catch a drink of water. The force of it is too much. It knocks the cup out of your hand.'

I believe Bishop Shaw continued with the insight that is what it is like when we try to get something out of the Passion narrative.

We sit here year after year with our mental cup, but most of us never seem to get much. Most of us just go away empty and thirsty, perhaps more so than when

we came. Maybe that tiny little rubric should say, "There is no easy understanding at the end of the Passion narrative."

### **Friendship and Companionship**

But maybe understanding is not what Jesus wants for us. Maybe it is a lot more basic than that. Maybe Jesus just wants friendship and companionship. After all, in John's Gospel, Jesus says, "I have called you friends." Maybe the question for us is, "Do we treat Jesus like a friend?"

What do friends do when the times get tough? They show up. They stick together.

### **Sticking Together: Showing Up**

Showing up and sticking together with Jesus through Holy Week has proved difficult right from the start. Woody Allen has that great line "90% of life is just showing up."

The truth is the disciples, past and present, do not have a great record at showing up and sticking together. Judas betrayed Jesus. Peter, James, and John fell asleep in the Garden. The disciples fled when Jesus was arrested. St. Mark tells us one of them was naked. He was asleep. When the soldiers came, he just bolted. Peter had the audacity to follow Jesus into the heart of darkness but he denied knowing him. The crowd turned on him. Only the women and the beloved disciple were present at the crucifixion. The men were gone.

### **2,000 Years Later**

2,000 years later we are no better. During Holy Week most of us flee to our daily lives. We are like the story of the healing of the 10 lepers. Only one comes

back to Jesus to say thank you and Jesus asks, "Where are the nine?"

Or, we are like the story of the man who wanted to follow Jesus, but first wanted to go bury his father. Jesus said, "Follow me and leave the dead to bury their dead."

### **Harsh Hebraic Hyperbole**

What Jesus is saying is that we always have a reason; we always have a "but". "I would like to be with you Lord, BUT I have all this stuff I have to do. I am sure you will understand, BUT we will get together soon."

Sometimes our journey of kinship and friendship with Jesus sounds like that song, *Cat's in the Cradle* with its line: "We'll get together soon."

### **Now**

It is Holy Week, the neediest week in our Lord's life, in our friend's life. The time has come for us to get together with our friend. Maybe the big Holy Week question is not "Do we understand?", but, "Were you there when they crucified our Lord?"

We go there through:

- participating in the daily services,
- reading the daily lections on our website, and
- through daily prayer.

### **Prayer for Jesus**

One last thought. Most often we pray to Jesus. This week let's pray for Jesus, as we would with a friend.

Who knows what will happen. Perhaps our cup will runneth over?

Amen.

