

SERMON 845

Sunday of the Passion

Palm Sunday

April 13, 2014

941st Week as Priest

767th Week at St Dunstan's

32nd Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

ARRIVING IN JERUSALEM

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

At long last, we arrived in Jerusalem.

We had been traveling together for a long time. We began in the wilderness forty days ago (a biblical way to say 'a long time'), and we had been pilgrims together, on the Jerusalem Road. There were times when the ways were difficult and the weather sharp. The despair and the hopelessness we felt when Jesus left us for a time are still etched in our memories.

But then we came to the gates of the holy city, and there were hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of people—young and old, rich and poor, healthy and sick—some who had been

waiting for days to catch a glimpse of the Master, riding on a donkey (which I later learned is the sign of a new king). They acclaimed him the Anointed One, the Messiah of God, the King of Israel!

We were surprised and overjoyed! The people cast down their cloaks in his path, and they waved palm branches before him. This was a most glorious and triumphant entry into the holy city! Everyone was happy, many weeping tears of joy, many straining just to touch him. It was more than we had imagined, more than any of us could have hoped for! We believed that this was the long-awaited Day of the Lord, the Coming of the King.

Back in the wilderness, those of us among the Twelve, his closest friends, confessed quietly to each other that we had been most anxious and fearful. Jesus spoke to us several times of impending doom in Jerusalem. He described it as “the city that kills her prophets.” He talked of death and rising again, but we interpreted this as a dream, a vision, a revelation of the final struggle that would set things right. One of our number, Judas Iscariot, even said that a final confrontation would be necessary for Jesus to win the crown of Israel. And we pledged to each other that we would stand and fight for God’s justice and for his Son Jesus.

But that seems a very long time ago. Back then we felt vindicated. The people recognized Jesus as a prophet from Nazareth in Galilee—and more, much more! They greeted him as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Someone said he was the new David. Another called him the Prince of Peace. We felt very proud of our Lord, and of our part in his work. The psalmist said, “This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes!”

But that was a few days ago. Since then it seems that the world has been disintegrating around us. All that we have known and believed and understood has fallen away. We are like lost sheep, and once again we are in a wilderness, bewildered and afraid.

On the night of the Passover, we gathered in an upper room. As we ate the bread of affliction, our Teacher said a strange thing: “This is my body. Take and eat.” We drank the cup of blessing, and he declared: “This my blood. Drink this, all of you.”

I thought my heart would break. Then he told us that one of the Twelve would betray him. Each of us was worried that we were his undoing, that we were the one to blame.

Of course, there was plenty of blame to go around. All of us fled from the garden when he was arrested. Simon Peter denied knowing Jesus not once, but several times. Most of us fled to the upper room to hide from the Sanhedrin and the Romans—from anyone who might recognize us as followers of Jesus.

Simon told us later that it was Judas who betrayed our Lord, but in a sense it made no difference; we had all abandoned him. Apparently Jesus was taken to trial by the chief priests and scribes and given a sentence of death. I still can't believe it!

Arriving in Jerusalem, we all had such high hopes. But now, all is lost. Everything is ruined. They say that he was crucified, like a murderer, a common thief, a spy against Rome. It is a horrible death, you know, truly horrible. I have seen a crucifixion and I pray never to see another. Only the women who had followed Jesus were there at his execution. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John. They were the brave ones, and we men were the cowards.

I am ashamed to tell you, but we left him when he needed us most. We are hiding and waiting, for what we do not know. We are humiliated and broken. We are praying for

a miracle, a sign, something, anything that will return what we have lost.

We thought Jesus of Nazareth was our strong deliverer. We believed that he was the son of the living God. We believed it! But right now all we know is that our Lord is dead, and our hearts are broken. And we fear that we will be the next to be crucified.

This is not what we thought would happen, not at all. I am sorry that we disappointed Jesus, and that we disappointed each other, and that we disappointed all of you. I am so very sorry. **AMEN.**

938 words