

"Truly, this man was God's Son!"
+ Lent 6 - Sunday of the Passion, Year A +
Matthew 27:54 NRSV
April 13, 2014

So where in heaven was God while his Son hung there between heaven and hell; between life and death? Between the hosannas and the hallelujahs -- the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, the not so triumphal exit come Friday - and Jesus' triumphant return to life on Easter -- where was God?

The simple, straightforward, orthodox answer is this:

Right there in front of everyone.

Right there; riding on a donkey, receiving the adulation of an expectant crowd.

That's where God was.

Standing before the Roman Governor receiving the third degree.

Rejected by rabble-rousers who called for the release of a man called Jesus Barrabas, instead of Jesus called the Messiah.

Scorned by the powers that be, for whom his activities meant a change in the status quo and in the equation of political power.

Beaten barbarically by soldiers who were "just following orders."

Paraded through the streets of the City a second time, this time not on the back of a donkey, but with a big piece of wood on his back.

Put upon, spat upon, and finally hung upon a cross. Not a decorative cross like ours in the sanctuary, but a deadly cross, the only purpose of which was to kill as deliberately and demonically as you or I could imagine.

That's where God was that week. That week we call "holy," because of what happened - but a week more ghastly than good. This week that begins hopefully today, descends to the depths of hopelessness by Friday, and ends with a new beginning and new hope as the first

day of a new week became the eighth day of this "Holy Week," with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God was there. For everyone to see.

We need to pay attention to that before we get to next Sunday with its emphasis on where Jesus wasn't. He wasn't in his grave. Come next Sunday.

But that's next Sunday. This Sunday, called "Palm Sunday" because they waved palm branches as he came into Jerusalem; and "Passion Sunday," because people waving palms quickly gave way to soldiers wielding whips; this Sunday we need to ask where God was while Jesus was "descending into hell." Where is God when my life is hell? Where is God when I need him?

We need to ask that, and pay attention to that, because otherwise we end up with a lovely "bouncy theology" – bouncing from the cherubic praises of the Boy Choir and enjoying the parade of palms and bouncing over the events of this week to to land at Easter to

enjoy the flowers and the fun and the chocolate - bouncing without ever coming down to that other reality in between.

But miss the middle and you miss the point. Miss the mess in which Jesus quickly found himself, and you miss the meaning of Easter.

Just about everyone missed it the first time around. And we still do.

The crowd missed it that Palm Sunday. They celebrated the way we celebrate: in anticipation of getting what they wanted - in their case, a "messiah." One who would take up the role of king and lead them to freedom from the rule of the Roman Empire. Here was someone they would follow into battle, to fight the "evil empire" of the Roman government, to free themselves from tyranny.

But Jesus didn't get off the donkey and yell "CHARGE" for them to follow Him into battle – no, he took their mess, their sins, your sins, my sins to the cross – dying as a single sacrifice – One - God's One and Only Son to die once and for all.

That they could not comprehend, not the disciples who had been told clearly what would happen in Jerusalem, or the people who were hoping for a Messiah King. But are we any more willing to truly consider the cost, the price that was paid, to pause and reflect on

the events of Holy Week where Jesus walked the way of sorrow?

Jesus faithfully followed the path of brokenness proving with every

step that our God is with us (Emmanuel) as we walk through this life -

assuring us, and when necessary reassuring us, that whether it's

hope that dies, or one we love who dies, or even ourselves who must

die, death does not defeat life in the end. For in the end, as in the

beginning, God is there. God is here, to guarantee it. AMEN