Sermons at Christ Church

Be God's Light That Shines In The darkness.

Palm Sunday
The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

Last Wednesday I had the privilege of leading the last of a five week series on our parish theme- "Be God's light in that shines in the darkness" In my presentation I quoted George Herbert in one of his poems talks about the human contradictions. He writes

Ah my dear Father, ease my smart!
The contrarieties crush me: these crosse actions
Do winde a rope about and cut my heart:
And yet since these thy contradictions
Are properly a crosse felt by thy sonne
With but foure words, my words, Thy will be done

Herbert makes the point that contrarieties crush us. But they are our cross. And it is with four words *Thy Will Be Done* can we bear that cross. He knew the pain of endless wanderings. His real journey only began after he had left behind the promise of a glittering career at court or university and settled into the obscure life of his little parish at Bemerton. Only then were his wanderings transformed into a journey home.

Palms Sunday, when considered in totality with the entre passion story, illumines for me, the idea of human contradiction. That you and I are a walking contradiction. We can hate on Asians but love Asian cuisine. We can hate on Hispanics but wouldn't have any problem with Hispanics cleaning our homes. Human contradictions.

Last year this beautiful holy space was quiet. The quietness stands in sharp contrast to the sounds and shouts of *'Hosanna, Hosanna. Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!*

Many of the people who shouted hosannas two thousand years ago took down branches of trees and spread their garments on the way. But last year, our hosannas were muted. We couldn't raise our palms together in joy, we couldn't sing and still cannot sing hosannas together. Our hosannas are muted. Amidst this muted hosannas, we begin Holy Week- a season which highlights human contradictions.

At the heart of who we are is a chasm-a disconnect with our own selves, a shade of darkness that leads us to wander away from home. For that reason we can be merciful and merciless with the same people, loving and callous with the same people we love, we can hug and stab those we call friends, we can lift people up and bring them down. We can be good and evil at the same time-often with little hesitation because we have the capacity to sing hosanna and shout crucify him at the same time-human contradictions.

The passion journey begins for me our initial steps towards the discovery of our deepest contradictions, more importantly, the blessing of knowing that unlike humpty dumpty, we can yet be put together again for the glory of God, that our innate contradictions are not enough, for the Easter story overshadows all our fault-lines. The Easter story leads us home.

Today, Jesus rides a donkey into a dark tunnel of human contradictions. You and I are also walking in a dark tunnel of fear, betrayal, anger, envy, callousness, brutality, war, sickness and even death. We can feel the darkness surround us like never before. Our present predicament of battling COVID-19 exacerbates this feeling of fear and darkness. We can see the Easter light, but from a distance. How far are we from this light? We don't know, but we are called to inch ever closer to it-for that is where home is.

In a few days, our muted songs of hosannas will fade away as we betray Jesus. Yes, a friend with whom he broke bread and drunk from the same cup. Judas thought that the Savior of the world was worth thirty pieces of silver. He thought that his friendship with the Lord was worth anything material. Remember the day when your trust was broken? Remember the day when those you trusted as friends, those with whom you broke bread, to whom you were loyal felt that their loyalty amounted to nothing? Human contradictions.

Remember the story of Peter who called Jesus he Messiah? He was the Rock upon which the church would be built. He had even promised to stay with him through thick and thin. He had vowed to offer his own life for the sake of the one who offers abundant life. And when he was confronted with the reality of his betrayal, he didn't believe it until it happened. The one who was willing to offer his life for the author of life couldn't even take the accusations of a poor little maid servant. Life in the tunnel, where we see nothing but darkness. Human contradictions. Yours and mine.

On Friday, the muted shouts of hosannas will give way to wrath, anger, jealousy and hatred. We will deliver to be crucified the one person who doesn't hold within himself any of the darkness of our contradictions. We will deliver to be crucified that one person who the darkness in life's tunnel cannot contain.

During the trial, Pilate asked repeatedly, what evil has he done? Which of the darkness of human contradictions does he carry? Why must he be crucified? We couldn't answer him. We drowned his questions with our shouts of crucify him because we had no answers, and we have had no answers ever since.

Paul captures the scourge of human contradiction in this way, "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing." Life in the tunnel of contradictions approaches its peak when we find ourselves in our own gardens of Gethsemane. Remember, in that Garden, Jesus was confronted with the choice, his will or God's will. As difficult a choice as that was, his response was simple, not my will but thy will. Not my will but God's will be done.

It is for this reason that the same Paul encourages us with these words- let that same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus-who though was in the form of God did not count equality with God as something to be exploited. But humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross. The hymn is a reflection of how Christ overcame our common human contradictions and offered us a path to the kind of salvation that frees us from the burden of being a walking contradiction.

Let the mind that was in Christ Jesus be also in you. That mind pursues the will of God. That mind is set free to the point where it can say with all confidence, thy will be done. Those who have the mind of Christ can attest that life can be dark, scary, meaningless and hopeless but they are not intimidated by life's challenges, they dare to praise God even in the face of adversity. In the midst of darkness, they gravitate towards the light which gives light to all people-because they know something about God's will.

As we do every day, we will deliver to be crucified him who knew no sin but emptied himself to die on the cross. This act of love was not to appease a blood thirsty God nor was it a token of forgiveness, but an expression of the profundity of love itself. It is that love that calls upon us to drain ourselves in order to be filled by that love.

Remember this, to love is to give yourself away-God has fallen in love with you, so much in love with you that He was willing to give Himself away. It is for this reason that he sent His son into the world to lead you out of the darkness of our contradiction in the tunnel and bring us home, where you belong.

We may be surrounded by darkness, but light is much closer than it seems. The more we inch closer to that light the more we recognize the impermanence of our dark contradictions. The more we come to appreciate the power of light over darkness.

On this Palm Sunday, as muted as our songs of Hosannas may be, we can still walk with the abiding hope that God holds our contradictions together. For our glory lies in that bright sunlight that appears at the end of the tunnel-that Easter light. Abiding in the dark tunnel isn't enough because God's desire is for you to come home to the light, where you belong. And so with our muted hosannas, come let's walk out of the dark tunnel into the sunlight of God's Easter glory. Amen.