

A Sermon for Palm Sunday, March 16, 2008
Immanuel Old Church, Hanover County, Virginia
by the Reverend David H. Knight, Interim Rector

*See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine
demands my soul. my life, my all.*

Iassc Watts (from Hymn 474)

The Passion Narrative from Matthew's Gospel in which we have just participated gives us a glimpse of our human nature. We can be so capricious, so fickle in our loyalties. We can be like the people on that Sunday who hailed Jesus as a hero as he entered the Holy City. They spread Palm branches along his path. It was like a ticker tape parade welcoming a celebrity. The crowd shouted "Hosanna in the highest!" But we can also be like those who, only five days later, 120 hours later, to be precise, shouted at the top of their lungs, "Crucify him! Crucify him." There is in human nature, something called a herding instinct. It happens when even just a few begin to show their dissatisfaction. Others chime in. "Ain't it awful," we say. The dissatisfaction spreads. We see it all around us. We put people on a pedestal. When they disappoint us for whatever reason we turn against them. We can do this to our friendships that turn sour when we become disappointed. When someone we like disagrees with us, we can turn on him or her in an instant. We can exhibit this behavior when we become disillusioned with leaders who disappoint us. The recent events, just for example, surrounding the Governor of New York's resignation, show how an individual can be on a pedestal and then be torn to pieces as people join in the chorus, "Ain't it awful," a dynamic being fueled by the news media and late night talk shows as well. The governor's alleged behavior was inappropriate, to say the least. His resignation from office is the right decision, yet he and his family need our prayers, not our derision. There must be some kind of torment in his soul. In his fall, and of those like him, we are all diminished. Jesus died and has risen for him just as he has died and has risen for each one of us no matter what we have done to bring brokenness into our lives and the lives of others.

Today's Passion Narrative is at the very center of our faith. What sustains our faith is that Jesus would live for us and would die for us, that he would accompany us in our suffering, our temptations, and that he would say to God, "Thy will be done." He could have called down angels to defend him. He could have recanted and saved himself from death on the cross. He could have condemned his betrayers. Instead, he chose to hang on the cross, knowing his death would ultimately defeat death and despair itself. He did that for them. He did all that for you, and for me. He has done that for all of human kind.

Today's Passion Narrative is a powerful reminder not just of our capricious nature as human beings. It is a reminder of God's love for us under any and all conditions. What, then, is our response to this incredible gift of unconditional love? How will this gift change your life? How will it change my life?

Next Sunday, we will celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus from the from the grave, but before we celebrate his resurrection, let us to walk the way of the Cross with him. Then, and only then, can you and I experience the fullness of Easter. Here at Immanuel, as in congregations everywhere, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday are important steps along that way for us. They are days of solemn devotion. Let us walk, and let us walk willingly, on this journey with him, willingly because God is not a coercive God. Let us come together on Thursday night and on Friday, not only for our own spiritual well being, but also so that we may support one another in this journey with our Lord on his way to the Cross and then beyond to the day of his resurrection. We are connected to each other in this journey as we are connected to Jesus in his journey. As you and I follow in the way of the cross, may we find it to be none other than the way of life and peace as you and I prepare our hearts for God's gift of hope on Easter Day. *Amen.*