

Palm Sunday A – Matthew 21:1-11

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today is known as Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion. There are two gospel readings: the triumphal entry to Jerusalem and the passion. I have been wondering and thinking about a different name for this day. What if we renamed today **"Turmoil Sunday?"** Does that sound like the gospel to you? Did you show up today hoping or expecting Jesus to bring some turmoil? Is the turmoil bringing Jesus the one you want to know and follow?

I guess that, for most of us, the answers to those questions are, **"No, no,"** and **"no."** I can honestly say that I have never prayed for Jesus to bring me some turmoil, and I am betting most of you have not either. Most of us probably pray for and hope Jesus will bring just the opposite: some peace and calm, answers to our questions, and solutions to our problems. We didn't come here today looking for turmoil. We came to hear the story of Jesus riding a donkey, to sing our hosannas, and to get our palms.

I suspect the crowds that followed Jesus were not so different from us. A ride on a borrowed donkey, songs of celebration and praise, garments and branches that fall before Jesus like the confetti of a ticker tape parade; now that's a triumphal entry. It was for them, and it is for us. Most of us are probably pretty happy to leave it at that.

So why would we rename this day “**Turmoil Sunday?**” Despite what we see, our expectations and hopes for the day, and even what we want to believe, the city itself, Jerusalem, has a very different experience of and response to Jesus’ triumphal entry. “**When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken and asked, ‘Who is this?’**” Jesus and turmoil seem to go together.

I wonder if Jerusalem sees and understands something we don’t. I wonder if we are too easily distracted by the donkey, hosannas, and palms so that we miss what is happening. I wonder if the city’s response just might be the most faithful and appropriate. Maybe we should all be in turmoil this day. Maybe turmoil is today’s good news. Maybe the turmoil Jesus brings is exactly what we need.

St. Matthew makes it very clear that turmoil sets the tone not just for today but throughout this entire week and even into Easter. It is not, however, our usual understanding of the word turmoil. It is more than just chaos, confusion, and uncertainty.

The Greek word translated as “**turmoil**” means “**to shake or quake**” and is descriptive of what happens during an earthquake. St. Matthew uses this same Greek word to describe Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, the shaking of the earth and the splitting of the rocks at Jesus’ crucifixion, the earthquake that accompanies the angel coming and rolling the stone away from Jesus’ tomb, and the shaking of the guard who stood at the tomb.

In all of these, Saint Matthew describes seismic events in which our lives and our world are shaken to the core, and something is destroyed. That's what earthquakes do. The destruction created by Holy Week, however, is not the end but a new beginning. The tremblers of this week will forever change who we are and the life we live.

On Monday, the fragrance of love will mingle with the coming death of Jesus, and everyone in the house will be shaken. On Tuesday, the invitation to die before we die will become the epicenter of our faith. On Wednesday, Judas' betrayal will reveal the fault line in all of us. On Thursday, we will tremble at the intimacy of touching and washing another person's feet and having them touch and wash ours. On Friday, the earth will quake as the cross of our creator is plunged into the heart of death. The silence of Saturday will cause the gates of hell to shudder and burst open.

Holy Week will be one earthquake after another. You know what happens in an earthquake. Earthquakes are destructive. The foundations on which we stand are shaken. Old things crumble and fall. The structures around which we have built our lives are left in ruin and rubble. That's how Jerusalem experiences Jesus' entry, and that's why this day should be called **"Turmoil Sunday."**

So, let me ask you this. What parts of your life and world need some Jesus kind of turmoil? What in you needs to be shaken awake and back to life? What has become foundational for your life but no longer supports

your life? What are the old ways of thinking, seeing, and acting that just need to crumble and fall? In what ways have you become a prisoner of the very structures upon which you built your life? Somewhere in each of our lives, we need the triumphant turmoil of Christ. It is the devastation of everything in us - Sunday of the Passion, Palm Sunday Sermon, Holy Week, and Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem - that keeps us from being fully alive, fully ourselves, and fully God's. It's the devastation that creates space and place for a new foundation, a new structure, and a new life.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The turmoil of this day is also its triumph. The triumph of Palm Sunday is not in the donkey, the hosannas, or the palms. It is Christ's earth-shaking entry into our world and our lives. It is a triumph that will continue to be revealed throughout this week. It is a triumph that happens whenever and wherever Jesus is present. **Amen.**