

Sermon 3-28-21 (following the Passion Narrative - Mark 14:1-15:47)
Rev. Mark Sloss

We started today by waving our green branches or our cloaks and joining our voices in a chorus of Hosanna, a word that means 'save us.' Though it may not appear so on the surface, the story we just told together is a story of salvation. I invite you to just let it resonate within you. It's not only a story about Jesus, or a story about events that happened some 2000 years ago. It's also our story.

I want to briefly share some thoughts and questions that I've had this week about this particular telling of the story. At Jesus arrest when all the disciples run off and desert him Mark includes the scene of a young man being grabbed, who leaves his linen cloth behind and runs off naked. Some have speculated that this is an autobiographical component of the story. But I wonder whether Mark meant to communicate that we can't hide from the naked reality that we too are among those who desert Jesus?

We too were part of the crowd shouting crucify him. We too were numbered among the soldiers who mocked and ridiculed him... The Equal Justice Initiative released a document in 2017 titled "Lynching in America." It reported how, in many cases, lynching in America from 1877 to 1950 took the form of public spectacle, "festive community gatherings" in which "large crowds of whites watched and participated in the Black victims' prolonged torture, mutilation, dismemberment, and burning at the stake." It's not that big of a jump back to this lynching tree and the ridicule and deriding directed at Jesus from Pilate, soldiers, and the crowd. They even sarcastically dressed him up and hailed him as the king of the Jews.

So I wonder how we should hear the words of the Roman centurion at the point of Jesus death? Might they be a continuation of the sarcastic derision from the soldiers and Pilate rather than a declaration of Jesus'

true identity: "Truly, this man was God's Son!" I've always thought it was the later, but now I'm not so sure. Perhaps it was both.

There's mystery in this story. It's a story that can save us from ourselves. It's a story that reveals to us our culpability in scapegoating and violence toward others. It's a story in which we're both deriders and the derided. We do the betraying, the denying, the deriding, and in solidarity with Jesus we are the ones forsaken, ridiculed and tortured unto death.

So one last question: If we are the body of Christ today, how might we enter into an embodied solidarity with all the marginalized and persecuted people in our world today? How might this story fill us with courage to love as Jesus loved, with a love that transforms our world? And as we ponder that, we keep in mind that Jesus' dying on the cross is not the end of this story. AMEN