

## **How to Deal with Stress and Turmoil** **Palm Sunday – April 2, 2023**

Normally, I give a little talk, called a sermon, after all the Bible readings. The sermon hopefully makes the Bible readings a little clearer or more relevant to today's world.

But on Palm Sunday, I like to give a short sermon, a homily, before the Gospel reading, which is always the Passion of Jesus. This long passage from scripture tells the story of Jesus' final hours on earth and ends with his crucifixion, death, and burial.

The service is ordered this way because the Passion story is the message. That is what we remember and take home with us, more than a sermon.

But I do want to share a few thoughts to get you thinking as we hear the Passion story.

The word that that comes up again and again in our story, is a word that we hear in our very first passage today, from the very start of our service, when we were hearing about the palms. We hear about Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, and the whole crowd welcomes him. They shout praises, "Hosanna," and lay down branches and coats as a kind of humble red carpet for this humble king. These are people who know a bit about Jesus and his miracles and his teachings.

But in the city are people who have no idea who this man is. And what does it say about Jerusalem when Jesus enters? "The whole city was in turmoil." Literally in Greek, the city was shaken, agitated, seismically moving. Jesus had arrived. And a lot of people didn't know what to make of him. Jesus shakes things up.

In a few minutes, we'll hear about all the turmoil that the people around Jesus experience. They are shaken. They are anxious. They are stressed.

Now as human beings, when we are stressed or troubled, we generally have one of two responses. We lash out or we run away. Fight or flight. We don't like being in turmoil, and so we try to end it quickly, or we distance ourselves from it.

Generally, that does not work out well. Those responses work great when we are in physical danger or distress, but they don't serve us well in response to emotional distress or turmoil, as we'll see.

So that is something I encourage you to pay attention to in our Passion reading. Where are those moments of turmoil, and how do people respond? Think about...

- The disciples when Jesus is arrested
- Peter, when he is accused of being one of Jesus' followers
- Pilate, when the crowd gets agitated
- The crowds, gathered from all over the region for Passover, surrounded by people they don't know, as they decide the fate of a man
- The bandits who are crucified with Jesus

- The religious leaders, looking up at the cross, knowing that their actions led to Jesus being there

There is a lot of lashing out, and there is a lot of fleeing or hiding.

If we see how not to act in the face of stress or turmoil, how we have to ask, how should we act? How should we behave when we are stressed, agitated? As you might expect, Jesus offers some answers. That's part of the power of Jesus: he wasn't just the Son of God with healing abilities; he also lived as a very self-aware, conscientious person.

What should we do when we are in turmoil?

1. Acknowledge it.

"I am deeply grieved, even to death," he tells his disciples. He shares his anguish with God. Too often, when we are stressed, we don't even realize it on a conscious level. We just unconsciously move right to fight or flight to try to alleviate that vague, unpleasant feeling.

2. Sit in the turmoil, and speak the truth. Sit in the turmoil, even if others around you cannot.

Watch how Jesus behaves in the midst of turmoil – when he's surrounded by the soldiers who arrest him, the priests who accuse him, Pilate as he questions him, the soldiers who mock him as the King of the Jews. Jesus does not run or hide from the turmoil, nor does he fight it. He abides there, and he speaks the truth.

That's a powerful example for you and for me. That kind of behavior takes practice, and it takes a deep groundedness in God. It's something we can work up to. There's no shortage of opportunities to practice in our world today. There is always stress, anxiety, turmoil. As followers of Jesus, we choose how we respond.

Amen.