

Sermon: Palm Sunday, 2010, Grace Church
The Rev. Susan K. Bock

“Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

Were you? I was. I was there at the parade, hoping like never before that maybe this was the messiah we’d been waiting for, for so, so long. We always knew he’d come right here to Jerusalem, at Passover, riding on a colt and now here he was, finally, so I shouted, louder than anyone, Hosanna! Blessed are you who has finally come. Finally!

I was there at supper, too, in that dark, sweet, cozy room, getting a little drunk, reciting the ancient words...“Why is this night different from every other night? Because this is the night that God led us through the Red Sea waters, out of slavery into freedom!”

It felt so right, more true than ever. I mean, this was our moment and he held in his own hands the power of the revolution we were so ready for and we were right behind him, the whole city was.

But then he started talking about dying, and I got so angry, and my heart became every bit as traitorous as Judas’ heart. I mean, what good is a savior who won’t do your bidding, follow your agenda, take you where you want to go? Yeah, I was there. Maybe you were, too.

And I was there, in the garden, and, sure, he was sad and tired and scared, but so was I, and really sleepy, too, after all that wine, so I just kind of nodded off.

And, yeah, I was there at court, washing my hands, like Pilate, of the whole mess, confused and disgusted at all the drama.

But didn’t I see you there, too, in that garden, at Pilate’s court? Didn’t I hear you say, “This isn’t my problem, I can’t be bothered, I don’t want to get involved. Let someone else take care of it”?

And then out by the fire, there I was right there with Peter, warming my hands, pretending not to know him. Hey, I’m usually honest, but, when the truth can get you killed, it’s okay to fudge a bit, isn’t it? I mean, if you don’t watch your back, who will?

And when the crowd started chanting, “Crucify him!” I’m afraid I screamed the loudest, just as fickle as everyone else, and mad as hell that things weren’t going my way.

“Kill the bum!” I shouted (and I’m pretty sure I heard you, too)...“That’s not the savior, king, president, bishop, hero, spouse, pastor we thought we were getting!”

I was even there with the soldiers, kicking a good man who was already down, because for a moment I had some power, and didn't feel so small and invisible. Anyway, he probably deserved it-nobody's completely innocent. That's what we told ourselves, you and I.

And when Simon of Cyrene got stuck with that god-awful, bloody, dirty cross, I was right there whining, "Why me, why this, why now? Life just isn't fair."

I was there at the end, too, with the women, taking care of things, but that's nothing to be so proud of. It wasn't courage or faithfulness-someone had to do it-but, since no one really cared what women did or said, so we weren't in any real danger. Anyway, I really resented getting stuck with the job.

And I was there in every so-called "innocent bystander", complicit in all that terrible injustice because I just stood by, and didn't speak up or lift a hand to stop it.

Palm Sunday makes me squirm because I find myself in every scene, shouting when I should have kept quiet, silent and immobilized when I should have spoken or acted. I was there, and so were you and it's hard to watch, this parade of all that is weakest and saddest about us, about me, all that's most in need of a savior.

Whenever I betray myself or another, nod off when I'm most needed, wash my hands of guilt, fail to speak the truth, hide in cowardice, abdicate responsibility, refuse to get involved, close my eyes, cross the road, run away mock, jeer, blame, lash out or lie, I know I was there.

You bet I was. It wasn't someone else's failure, anger, or indifference that crucified him. It was mine, and it breaks my heart.

But then I remember that I had to be there, and you did, too. That's why he was there. We're why he was there. He was there for us. We're the ones for whom he absorbed the blows and the lies. We're the ones into whose eyes he looked with tenderness just when we said, "I told you, I don't know him!" We're the ones for whom he sought forgiveness because we didn't know what we were doing. We are the very ones he went all that sad distance for, and goes, still, taking us and all our failings, again and again to where we, and they, can be forgiven, healed, and freed.

It's because I was there, and you, too, with all our confusion, cowardice, selfishness and rage that he was there, too, with all his amazing, restoring, redeeming love

"I walked this lonesome valley," he says, "for you, heart-broken, sin-sick, battle-weary, lonely, frightened, bored and guilty one whom I adore, knowing exactly who and what you are, and how you would fail, and fall, and flee, and forget, and break your covenant with life and love a thousand times a day. I was there with you on Good Friday so that you could be there with me at Easter.

On Palm Sunday we see him stopping for each of us, gathering up our failures into his faithfulness, and trudging on all the way through death into life, with us, for us, setting us free from all that entombs us, and not just once, but again and again, so that we can become the Easter people he made us to be.

And all he asks is that we let it be so. To let it be for us. To give up the pathetic attempt to be our own savior and god and bring the self that we are-not the shinier, prettier, cleaned up version we pretend to be, the better Christian we imagine or wish we were, but the one so utterly in need of this saving love, and to let it be ours, to take it in, to drink it up, to wrap it around us, this love, this amazing love.

It's *because we were* there that he is here, making us a Sunday people for a Friday world.

So in this holiest of weeks, dare to come walk with him. Come as you are...come angry, come sad, come ashamed, come confused, come tired, come lost or come alone, but come. Leave your excuses. Forget your fears. Quiet your doubts and come. Let him be for you the savior he so longs to be, for you, even you, and come. Come as you are, to be washed, fed, forgiven, restored and renewed. Come die with him, and be made ready to rise and live with him again.