

14 April 2019
Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Change”

Text: John 12:12-19; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22-23

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Things in life can change in an instant. And often do.

Today in the readings we heard, things changed dramatically in the span of one week. Shouts of hosanna changed into cries of crucify. The waving of palms was replaced with the cracking of whips. Riding on a donkey was traded for hanging on a cross. And a man full of life was by the end of the week laying dead in a tomb. A whirlwind doesn't even begin to describe it. A whirlwind that took twelve disciples from following their King into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to being holed up in fear behind locked doors on Saturday. With no clue of what they were going to do now.

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We often respond to this by trying to take control. To stop the change or make it go the way we want. And lots of folks were trying to do just that. Judas tried to take control by betraying Jesus; make things go the way he thought best. When Jesus was being arrested, Peter drew his sword to try to take control of the situation. The chief priests kept trying to orchestrate things to get their way. And Pilate, too, tried to exercise the control he did have as Roman governor of the province of Judea. But even he was stymied - by Herod, by the chief priests, by the crowd.

Because there was only one who really was in control: the who always is. The one who would drink the cup the Father gave Him. The one who would not defend Himself with weapons or words. The one who would not hate those who hated Him, nor revile those who reviled Him. The one who made Himself nothing and laid down His life. Others thought they were taking it from Him, but no. They did only what He allowed them to do. He could have stopped it in an instant, calling on more than twelve legions of angels to protect Him, against whom many legions of Roman soldiers would stand no chance. But Jesus would not do that. Instead, the Almighty allowed Himself to be bound. The Judge of all allowed Himself to be judged. The Lord of life allowed Himself to be crucified. He controlled it all.

Even His words while on the cross denote the one not caught in an out of control circus of unfortunate events, but the one in control. Father, forgive them. Today you will be

with me in Paradise. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

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But the truth is that nothing that week changed at all. This was the plan from the beginning of time, from the first sin that plunged us and all the world into death. That the Son of God would come and do this. He would lay down His life for the life of the world. For your life. That you may have life.

For you are now the disciples. As surely as He chose the twelve, so He has chosen you. You know the story, how it turns out, and the celebration that awaits us next Sunday. The original twelve didn't know all that, though Jesus told them. But they couldn't understand it at the time. Only later would they remember. Only later would the Spirit enable them to see: that it was all according to plan. That Jesus was in control the whole time.

But as I said, you are now the disciples, and things in this life can change in an instant. And often do.

One wrong word or deed can change your life. A careless word ends a friendship. An honest mistake winds up with you losing your job. The doctor brings you word that that thing you have in your body - they don't have a cure for, or maybe even a treatment. Or, somebody else makes a mistake that changes everything for you - a drunk driver, a false accusation. Or maybe your sin catches up with you. What you thought you got away with suddenly becomes known. The hurt you caused cannot be undone. And maybe you even have days when Judas seems to be a better description of you than any other name.

Things in life can change in an instant. And often do.

And they did, for you, when you were baptized. At that moment, the one who is always in control made you His son, His daughter, and said: Father, forgive him; forgive her. And: you will be with me in Paradise. At that moment, Jesus took you into His death and resurrection, to give you new life and hope. At that moment, Jesus took everything He has and everything He did and gave it to you. And He made you a promise. He said: That's never going to change. I won't take it back. You can refuse my gift. Leave me at the altar as a jilted Bridegroom in favor of your life of sin. But I will not ever take back my promises, my vows, to you. When you need mercy, I will be here for you. When you need forgiveness, I will be here for you. When you need life, I will be here for you. I gave my life for you, and I am still giving my life to you. Here. Take it. Eat it and drink it. My Body and Blood. It's here for you. I am here for you. Always. And that's never going to change.

So maybe we've been going about it all wrong - life. Maybe we haven't been doing it right at all. For like Judas, Peter, Pilate, and the chief priests, our first instinct, in response to things changing, is to try to take control. Make ourselves something and do something

about it. But what if Jesus was right, and the way to do something about it is to make ourselves nothing. That's what Paul says, after all:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

So maybe we could do as Paul says. So let me revise this for us, to put us into these words, in this way:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, that though you are a baptized child of God, did not count this status as a thing to be grasped, but make yourselves nothing, taking the form of a servant, and humbling yourself, even to the point of death.

If we do that, then into this world where life can change in an instant, and often does, we bring into this whirlwind of change the one who never changes and is in control. When we make ourselves something and try to take control, then it's on us. When we make ourselves nothing, then it's on Him and His control.

But to make ourselves nothing means not to do nothing, but to do as Jesus did. To love those who hate us and bless those who revile us. To forgive those who sin against us and have mercy on those who cry out to us. And when you do those things, Jesus is in control, not you. Which is hard, and a bit scary, as change and not being in control often is.

But as disciples, we know how the story is going to turn out. You know what we are going to celebrate next Sunday, and the celebration that is going to take place on the Last Day. You know the one who is in control of all things, and that He is your Father and Saviour. And because of that, everything has changed for you, and that nothing will change that for you. You are a baptized, forgiven, dearly loved, child of God. And though everything in your life change and fall apart, that will not.

So when things in your life change in an instant, as they often do, or even when they don't, remember that moment when everything changed for the better - when the tomb was empty, when the Word of God was fulfilled, and the gate to heaven was opened. And cry out your Hosanna! And know - and hear, especially this week - that He did.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.