

**Sunday, March 24, 2013**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon – Reflections on the reading of the Passion Story**

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Today is an interesting day in the life of the church.

It is the day when we celebrate the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

We want to linger there, to bask in the recognition that after three years, the crowds finally realize the greatness of Jesus.

We feel joy that Hosannas are finally being sung.

If only this were the end of the story.

We, however, know that this is not the end of the story.

Hence the profound tension in Palm Sunday.

We have a brief but haunting burst of sunshine as Jesus is surrounded by the crowds, waving palm branches and songs of praise to God.

Yet the storm clouds are quickly gathering.

There's a brooding sense of impending tragedy as Jesus stops his descent from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem and weeps.

Indeed there is something both gloriously joyful and awesomely bitter about this day.

Today we are looking into the mystery of the heart of God.

Today we witness how God holds infinite sorrow and infinite joy together.

The lectionary readings for today helps us live with the tension.

Psalm 31:9-16 sets the scene for Jesus' Jerusalem experience evoking a mood of impending suffering:

*For I have heard the whispering of the mob.*

*Fears are all around me.*

*They put their heads together against me,*

*they conspire to take my life.*

And then from Isaiah, a poem about the true servant of God whose willing suffering will become deeply redemptive.

*I did not hide my face  
from shame and spitting.*

We know that it is Jesus of whom Isaiah speaks.

Today we acknowledge that Jesus was first lauded with glory and honor and then betrayed, and then crucified.

Next week we will gather to celebrate with joy that our Savior has conquered death and risen from the tomb.

But today, while we started with joy – we will end with sorrow- just as the disciples did.

We will journey with Jesus through his Passion – through Holy Week.

This is the foundational story of our faith.

We are going to read the passion narrative – which we will revisit again Thursday night and Friday – but I want each of you to have the story in your heart as you travel through Holy Week.

I want this to be a week when you remember the human potential to turn away from God.

I want this to be a week when you meditate on what it means that Jesus was willing to suffer and die for you.

I want this to be a week – a holy week – when you feel so close to God that it makes you weep.

I want this to be a week that you pray for the joy of Easter to cleanse your heart and make all things new.