

The Rev. Kristin Krantz
St. James', Mt. Airy
3/20/16

Palm/Passion Sunday
Luke 19:28-40
Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Luke 22:14 – 23:56

One of my favorite children's books is *The Easter Story* by Brian Wildsmith.

I love it for two reasons. First, it has the most amazing illustrations – the kind that set your heart to singing; and secondly, because it is a wonderful telling of the Easter story for children that in no way dumbs down the events from Palm Sunday all the way through the Ascension.

It tells this final part of the Jesus story through the eyes of a donkey – without ever once skirting into cheesy or cutesy. Instead, we see all the well-known events unfold with the donkey as the constant witness and presence.

He begins the story close to Jesus, giving him the ride into Jerusalem as the palm branches waved and the shouts of hosanna rang. And then as the story progresses, we see the donkey – always present – but always in the distance: close enough to witness the Last Supper through a window and watch Jesus pray in the garden as the disciples slept snuggled around his warm body; near enough to hear the accusations of his trials and gaze at Jesus on the cross; but always separated from him.

Until it is time to take Jesus down from the cross, and then it is the donkey who carries Jesus' broken body to the tomb.

Like the women who will prepare spices and ointments, the donkey will also return to the tomb and see the angels say, “He is not here. Here is alive again.” He will stay with Jesus’ friends as they live into the mystery of Easter, all the way until Jesus ascended, returning fully to God.

It is only then that one of Jesus’ friends will take the little donkey back to his home, where he will live out the rest of his life, re-remembering the story of Jesus.

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It doesn’t take much to see that in this story we are the donkey.

The truth is, that like that book which has been read repeatedly in my house over the years, we here come together to read and hear the same stories again and again. Because just like the donkey, we re-member again and again – as a way to make meaning and to remember **who** and **whose** we are.

But we are not yet ready to return home, we are still on this side of Easter, so today we pause and remain with the confusion, horror and pain of the crucifixion and tomb. We will not stay here long – just as Jesus did not – and like the donkey we will soon live into the fullness of our story and spend the rest of our lives both looking back and living forward.

In the poem *The Poet Thinks about the Donkey*, Mary Oliver put it this way:

On the outskirts of Jerusalem
the donkey waited.
Not especially brave, or filled with understanding,
he stood and waited.

How horses, turned out into the meadow,

leap with delight!

How doves, released from their cages,

clatter away, splashed with sunlight!

But the donkey, tied to a tree as usual, waited.

Then he let himself be led away.

Then he let the stranger mount.

Never had he seen such crowds!

And I wonder if he at all imagined what was to happen.

Still, he was what he had always been: small, dark, obedient.

I hope, finally, he felt brave.

I hope, finally, he loved the man who rode so lightly upon him,

as he lifted one dusty hoof and stepped, as he had to, forward.¹

I am so very thankful for Mary Oliver, who time and again is able to see to the heart of things and put into words the stirrings of *my* heart.

Not especially brave, or full of understanding...

Then he let himself be led away...

Still he was as he had always been...

I hope finally he felt brave...

He lifted one dusty hoof and stepped, as he had to, forward...

We are the donkey.

¹ From *Thirst*.

Nothing special, or so it seems, except that we carry, each of us, a piece of God within us, just as the donkey carried a piece of God on his back. We don't have to be brave or full of understanding, and yet, there is hope that we will continue to grow into the people God wants us to be, and we do that by putting one foot in front of the other and joining the story and mission of God to bring justice, compassion and reconciliation into this world.

And so, that is where we are today. We are walking in the midst of *the* story, *our* story. We are carrying Jesus. We carry him with us on the good days when we hear the shouts of Hosanna. And we are carry him with us on the not so good days when the pain of the world pushes down. We carry him with us on the days in between, as we, like Jesus, speak truth to power, eat and celebrate with our friends and families, and pray in our gardens.

It is now up to each of us to make space this week to really walk and remember the story of Jesus. Thursday begins the Triduum—the great three days of the church year, spanning Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

Come to these services and be present to witness and partake in our greatest story. Wash the feet of another on Maundy Thursday. Immerse yourself in the nearly incomprehensible sorrow and love of Good Friday. Walk from darkness to light and celebrate the first Eucharist of Easter at the Vigil Saturday night. I promise that if you do, you will be transformed.

We are the donkey, and so this week let us be like the donkey, an abiding presence to the events that will lead us into the mystery of Easter.

~AMEN~