

Palm Sunday
April 1, 2007
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In his stunning book: **Evil and the Justice of God**, N.T. Wright the Anglican bishop of Durham, England says the following: “We ignore evil when it doesn’t hit us in the face and so we are shocked and puzzled when it does.” (p.26). It is no secret that we live in a death defying and death denying culture. This is especially true in the suburbs. By and large suburban Americans have neither the experience nor the desire to have any kind of serious understanding of the evil which exists in the world around us. We live in a bubble largely untainted and untouched by the woes of even those who live thirty miles east. When the biggest story in the police reports section of our neighborhood newspaper, the Northville Record, is that of a stolen bicycle, you know that life for us is very different.

Fortunately our faith gives us the tools to deal with a more realistic picture of the whole of humanity. No where is that more apparent than in the services of Holy Week. This day, the day of Palms and Passion, begins the immersion into an experiential understanding of Jesus’ death. Of all days, this day of celebration and sorrow gives us a holistic understanding of our faith. We experience the joy of the procession into Jerusalem and then we experience the evil of the cross. And so it goes through the entire expanse of Holy Week services. Love and goodness, hatred and evil. Over and over again the juxtaposition of these themes is revealed to us in the unique services of this week.

Why is it essential for us to have some understanding of the complexities of the world, not the evil of individuals as evidenced on the local evening news but systemic evil? Why is sheltering ourselves and our children from a global perspective perhaps one of the biggest mistakes that many Americans make? If we protect ourselves from all that is going on in the world, then we are ill prepared for what can and does happen. Perhaps 9/11 taught us the folly of keeping our eyes closed. Perhaps...

Fortunately for us the film industry and the world of literature are increasingly making it possible for us to develop the ability to develop an understanding of the crosses that various people of the world carry. The film *Blood Diamonds* and Ishmael Beah’s book *A Long Way Home – Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* tell the tragic story of Sierra Leone in ways that history books never could. I must confess, I have a deep hunger to know these stories, to know where the reality of the cross is prevalent. I immerse myself in these stories, the stories of modern day crucifixion because it strengthens me and feeds my desire to be connected. Immersing myself in these stories has prepared me well for walking with you the members of my flock when tragedy touches your lives. One of the many purposes of the Christian community is to wrap our love around each other when random acts of the cross touch our lives. If we don’t have a well developed sense of spiritual preparation, maturity and support, we freeze when tragedy strikes. I will never forget last year when I was involved with helping families touched by the tragedy of the first grader at my daughters’ school who died in an accident. One of the parents said to

me in absolute desperation: “Can’t we tell the kids that she moved?” Death denying at its most extreme...

While we have to use some common sense especially with regard to our children, I am personally very grateful for the books for young audiences that have been published in recent years that address evil in the world. There are wonderful early elementary age books that tell the story of the holocaust, the Japanese internment camps in our Western States, the stories of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, to name just a few.

Knowledge of the sorrow of the cross is important for our children to experience which is why every year, I plead with parents to bring their children to the Holy Week services. When young children experience the power of the foot-washing service and the power of touching the cross on Good Friday, they grow in ways that will help them live fully, with spiritual confidence in this world.

Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday are not simply about the sorrow of the cross. This day is a dramatic rendering of the liturgies that we celebrate every week because every time we celebrate the Eucharist we repeat the entirety of our belief: “Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again”. It is this totality of life experiences that is present with us whenever we gather together. At any given public liturgy, there are always those who are carrying a cross and those who are celebrating a resurrection. The reality of life is lived out in the power of our liturgy. As we embark on this journey with Jesus through Jerusalem let us always remember and embrace the hope that is given to us through the cross as well as the resurrection.