

**Sunday, March 24, 2024**  
**Palm/Passion Sunday (Year B)**  
Mark 11.1-11; Mark 14.1—15.47

*The Rev. Michael K. Fincher*

*Service Live Streamed at:*

<https://www.facebook.com/stgregorystlongbeach/videos/429720872766573>

*(Sermon begins at about 38:45)*

### **“Palm/Passion Journeys”**

You may have noticed that during the season of Lent, I frequently use the term “Lenten journey” as a way of characterizing our experience. A reminder that as we move from Ash Wednesday to Good Friday, we are not just marking days off the calendar as a countdown to Easter. If we are doing Lent appropriately, we are making a journey as people of faith. This journey occurs on several levels. Symbolically, this journey is one we take with Jesus as he “turns his face toward Jerusalem.” As he shifts his focus from his public ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing, to beginning to make his way toward Jerusalem and the events and experiences we just heard in the Passion Narrative. But this 40 days is more than just recalling the story of Jesus’ journey as he draws closer and closer to Jerusalem. This is also a spiritual journey that we make, individually and as a community. A journey in which, through our own Lenten disciplines, we seek to draw closer to God. A journey in which we seek to strengthen and deepen our relationship with God and with Christ. Bringing us closer to the One who stands in solidarity with us. With the One who loves us so much he would do anything for us, including being willing to die for us.

The fact that Jesus stands in solidarity with us is epitomized in two additional journeys that play out in our liturgy for this day. We started off by witnessing Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem with shouts of “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” Experiencing the jubilation of the people as they welcome their long-awaited Messiah. This journey representing the fulfillment of the hopes and the dreams of the people. Dreams that we all share. Dreams of liberation. Dreams of freedom. Dreams of fulfillment. Dreams of wholeness and wellbeing. Dreams that he shares with us, as represented by him humbly entering the gates of Jerusalem riding on a lowly donkey. Similarly, he does not arrive with a royal entourage but rather is accompanied by common folk like you and me. Revealing that this King, this Messiah, is unlike any other. That this One has come to turn the status quo upside down, to lift up the lowly, to make all things new.

Yet, in the space of a few days, the tone changes radically. The One who made his triumphal journey, who was received as beloved and exalted king, is now treated as an outcast, as a criminal. Instead of being afforded loyalty, he is now betrayed by one of his closest friends. Instead of being supported by those closest to him, he is abandoned. Instead of being embraced as friend, he is denied as a stranger. Instead of being escorted with pomp and circumstance, he is arrested and put on trial for crimes he did not commit. Instead of being dressed in lavish robes, he is stripped. Instead of being exalted, he is beaten. Instead of being cheered, he is mocked. Instead of being hailed as the One who will bring justice, he is found

guilty in a miscarriage of justice. Instead of shouts of “Hosanna!” he is greeted with cries of “Crucify him!”

Thus begins Jesus’ second journey. The journey along the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows. The street through Jerusalem that leads from Pilate’s headquarters to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull. The tone of Jesus’ journey along the Via Dolorosa is the exact opposite of his journey a few days before. Instead of a joyful and triumphant entry into Jerusalem, this is a painful and agonizing journey out of Jerusalem. Where, instead of being installed on a throne, this king is nailed to a cross.

Just as the journey into Jerusalem demonstrated Jesus’ solidarity with us in our joys, in the fulfilment of our hopes and dreams, his journey along the Via Dolorosa is also made in solidarity with us. Only now, this journey embodies the depths of despair, the pain and the sorrow, we can and do experience at times in our lives.

Jesus makes these two journeys in rapid succession, acknowledging and honoring what we experience in our day-to-day lives. The highs and the lows, the joys and the sorrows, the victories and the failures. In so doing, Jesus embraces and sanctifies the totality of our human experiences. And through what comes at the end of the Via Dolorosa, what happens at Golgotha, will redeem those experiences, providing for the deepening of relationship between us and our God in a way never before imagined.

On this Palm Sunday, on this Passion Sunday, Jesus’ journey has taken him from his triumphal entry down the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem where he was hailed as the long-awaited Messiah. That journey has taken him along the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows, ending with him nailed to a cross. We have followed in that journey, ending with us standing helplessly at the foot of the cross as we witness the death of our Lord. As we, numbed by what we have witnessed, watch as his body is taken down from the cross and hastily placed in a tomb. As we remember why this has happened. As we remember this has been done for us—for each and every one of us. For our redemption. For our salvation. This is what Jesus’ journey has been about. This is what our journey has been about.

How can we not be changed by what we have witnessed these 40 days? How can we not be changed by what we have witnessed during this time in Jerusalem? How can we not be changed having witnessed our Lord being crucified and placed in a tomb?

This is our journey. And yet, the journey is still not over.