

Today, we begin a journey that holds within it the fullness of the human story -- the wonder, the grief, the hopes, the fears. In the span of seven days, we praise, process, break bread, wash feet, make promises, break promises, deny, betray, condemn, abandon, grieve, despair, disbelieve, and celebrate.

I believe the world is haunted by ambiguous feelings of this last week which have to do with triumph and tragedy, victory and defeat, honour and dishonour.

We, my friends, must not remain observers, we are to be participators in the story of Jesus with this story again and again demanding not only our attention but our decision.

Many people spend their lives remaining a part from the group rather than a part of the group.

They would rather be lukewarm than warm hearted.

They would rather be contented than committed.

They would rather be an observer than a participator.

They would rather save money than save the world.

They would rather attend a Sunday brunch than a Gospel feast.

On that first palm waving day, Jerusalem was full of people who lived their lives in neutral gear. Yet no one living in neutral gear ever moved forward, or climbed a hill, or had a dream or caught a vision.

There comes a time for every person to make a decision.

Palm Sunday is a reminder that Jesus confronted Jerusalem with a decision. And Palm Sunday means that Jesus confronts us with that same decision today.

To assist, and guide us to our decision in the liturgy of the church for this day, this week, we are invited to experience the events of Jesus' last week, as he and his disciples experienced them.

In this week, Jerusalem is busy with thousands of people making final preparations for the Passover celebrations. The streets and marketplaces are crowded. It is a serious time, as it is a joyous, celebratory time.

There is a small, dark room in a corner of the temple where it is quiet.

A group of men are speaking in hushed voices. Their quietness is not out of respect for the location in the temple but because they are talking about things they don't want anyone else to hear. They are the leaders of the faith, the priests of the temple, and the scribes responsible for protecting the Jewish law.

They have a problem, and his name is Jesus.

The quietness of the priests and scribes in that small temple hideout is broken when they hear someone approaching and opening the small door into the room. We don't know if they were actually surprised, or even if they recognised Judas coming through the door. Yet he would have brought

smiles to their faces as they realised the solution to their problem was standing before them.

All it took was the promise of a kiss for a few coins.

While at the top of the Mount of Olives, which is across the valley from the city, is the little village of Bethany. In Bethany there is another room. Jesus is reclining at the dinner table with the rest of the group, watching closely as Mary walks over to him, with expensive perfume. She and he know there will be no other day, no other hour, in this last week.

The disciples had spent a busy day running around making final preparations for the Passover celebration. They all gathered in a room to enjoy the feast. If it was like the other gatherings taking place around town, they were telling stories, old and new, and following the familiar steps of the traditional Passover seder meal – traditional until the time that Jesus paused and said that one of them in the room was going to betray him. Mark never actually told us who that person was, but just said it would actually be better for that person if they had never even been born. As the seder meal begins, the host takes a piece of bread and tears it into pieces. Mark tells us that Jesus passed the bread around and said this is my body. Mark tells us that Jesus passed the cup around the table and said this is my blood.

After the Passover meal, they walked to the edge of the city near the Mount of Olives, where Jesus said that they would all betray him. In fact, he said that before the sun came up in the morning, Peter would actually betray him three times. Peter insisted it was not true, and they all argued with Jesus and insisted they would all remain true to him forever, and follow him to the end of the world. They didn't even make it to the end of the cross. They run off into the darkness to save their lives. They leave the Saviour of the world to save themselves. They run from the very one who saves. Fear and disbelief led them to run away. All these years later people are still running away.

Jesus is calling us to be witnesses in today's world, for there is no private Christianity.

Jesus is calling us to be servants, for there are no observers in Christianity.

Jesus is calling us to be the church, for there is no uninvolved Christianity.

One day, one palm-waving day, Jesus entered into Jerusalem, the Holy City, and said to everything unholy,

"Stand aside."

Jesus is calling us to join him in the parade, and to say to every form of hatred, bigotry, ignorance and apathy,

"Stand aside."

This is the last week. This is a part of our experience as a people of faith. You need to decide. Or stand aside.

*Wendy*