

The Rev. Jerrold Thompson

Homily for Palm Sunday

St. Mark's on the Campus

April 9, 2006

**I**N SOME WAYS, THIS SUNDAY seems an odd combination to us. We start out singing Hosannas, and then we move into the reality of the passion and suffering of our Lord, and we find ourselves shouting, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!"

One point that this day drives home like no other is that we who are willing to sing hosannas to Jesus one minute are just as willing—and not too long afterward—to join the crowd in shouting “crucify him, crucify him,” or at the least, to abandon Jesus as those closest to him do. We carry the reality of our divided hearts with us day after day, relying most deeply on God's forgiveness of us as it pours out of our Lord Jesus.

On Ash Wednesday at the beginning of Lent, we begin our liturgy with the following words: “Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts. . . .” There's not much else except the love of God for all of creation—including each of us—that makes bearable the thought that one moment we praise God with our lives, and the next moment we deny God with those same lives; that one moment we can long to serve God because we know to whom we belong—and the next moment we can be ambiguous about who we are and whom we hclly want to serve; and our hearts can change in an instant, sometimes without us even realizing it until it's simply too late.

In the end, I trust that we will not choose to serve that which is other than God. His closest disciples—after watching Jesus die from a distance –chose in the end to die for Him, as He had for them.

But in that in between space, the space of our ambiguous hearts -it's all too easy to turn our backs and flee, to hide our convictions, to remain silent in the face of injustice, to miss an opportunity to act on behalf of God's reign. And because it's all too easy, we end up doing it.

Personally, I rather like ambiguity. It's intellectually appealing; often it encompasses many perspectives and holds them in tension. I find myself living in ambiguity quite often. Maybe *too* often.

For in the reality of my ambiguity, the poor around the world continue to starve when they could be fed. And the oppressed down the street from me continue to be crucified, psychologically and emotionally; sometimes physically. And I continue to hurt those whom I love most closely, most deeply; those for whom I would die without a thought, but to love them actively day to day seems so much more difficult.

Sometimes ambiguity is unfaithful to our Lord Jesus. For in loving *us*, in riding into Jerusalem and directly into the week that is to come, Jesus is very clear; he's more clear than we can usually comprehend, more clear than our eyes can see and our ears hear; he's more clear, perhaps, than we want him to be, about what serving God is all about.

We who have the cross marked on our forehead at baptism have an obligation to be clear and unambiguous about that, too.

“O God you hate nothing you have made. And you forgive the sins of all who are penitent: create and make in us new hearts . . . through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Amen.