This is the Story

April 9, 2006 (Palm Sunday, Year B)

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 | Psalm 22:1-21 | Philippians 2:5-11 | Mark 15:1-47

This is the story. This is the story we tell every Sunday, this is the story we tell every day, about our teacher, our rabbi, our friend, our brother, our savior and our Lord.

This is the story that we were told at our baptism, this is the story that we live with our lives; this is the story that will be told at our death. This is the story that we will tell when we are raised up.

It is not an easy story. It is a terrible thing, to come in to church with hosannas, waving palms, singing loudly, and then land with a crash in the anguished Passion narrative. These friends here, with whom you were singing hosanna, these friends here, turning and shouting "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

We live lives of complexity, and we have known violence, physical or verbal or spiritual violence. We have suffered violence, we may have done violence. The whiplash of Palm Sunday can be heartbreaking, can call up for us the betrayal and grief and violence of our own lives. It is not an easy story, the story of our faith.

It is an awful story. An awful story, a story full of awe. Our faith is not bloodless. We are not the frozen chosen, but believers in a living God, who chose to become incarnate to live and rejoice and suffer and die as one of us.

The great flaw in the Gnostic gospels, including the Gospel of Judas that's made such a splash in the news this week – the great flaw of the Gnostics is that theirs was a bloodless faith, an attempt to eviscerate the stories of Judaism and Christianity into a cosmology where the body was nothing but evil, clothing that would be left behind on a journey to heaven.

Judas, the Gnostics believed, was a true disciple who helped Jesus return to heaven by betraying him to the authorities, to the cross. Ah, but with friends like that, who needs enemies?

These are the knots we tie ourselves in, when we try to avoid the awful stories, when we try to find a bloodless faith away from the messiness of the world, the reality of suffering and sin and injustice, the brokenness of hunger and war which God calls us to address.

And thanks be to God, thanks be to God, thanks be to God, this is not all of the story. The story didn't end on the cross.

The story didn't end on the cross. You'll have to come back next week to hear what happens next.

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