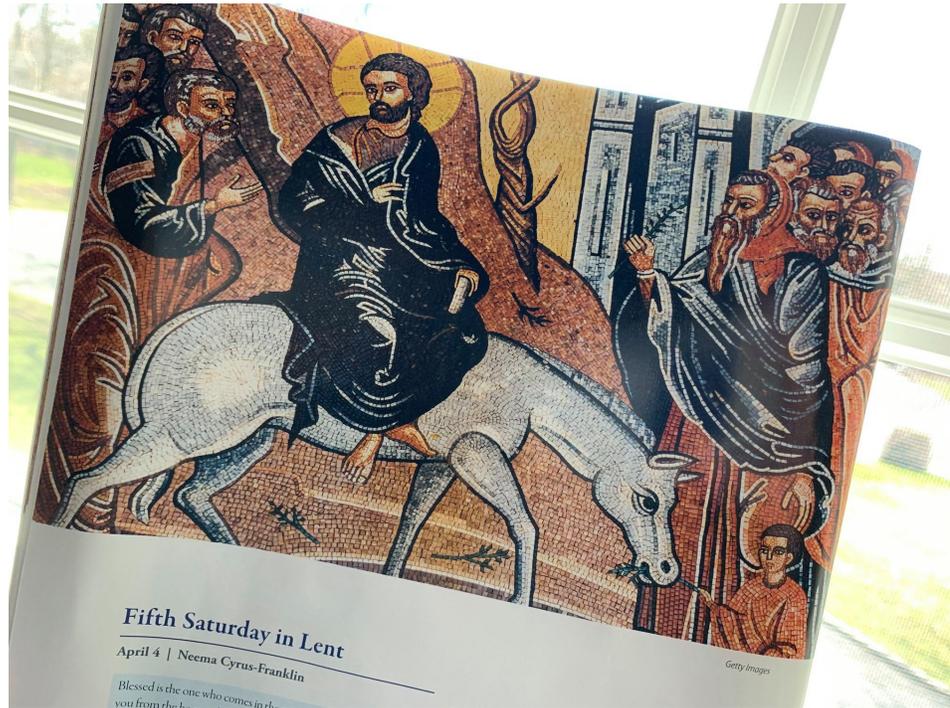


April 4, 2020 Daily Devotional

Today's scripture passage is a traditional one for Palm Sunday. It is from Psalm 118: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord....You are my God, and I will give thanks



to you; you are my God, I will extol you. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

I needed to read those words this morning, and also the words of the reflection in our devotional booklet written by Neema Cyrus-Franklin, who says:

"When I was a child, the elders in my home congregation would recite Psalm 118 seemingly every Sunday. As a 'preacher's kid,' I often overheard the hardships faced by those in our church as my parents prayed on their behalf. There were countless struggles and challenges: untreated mental illnesses, homelessness after losing a job, discrimination at school and the workplace, wrongful incarcerations and years of legal bills, to name a few. I knew those in the congregation were living through a nightmare and I couldn't understand why or how they could extol the words of the psalmist amid such seemingly insurmountable odds. Years later, I understood this lesson from my youth. At times, our world seems to spin out of our control; out of our ability to will a favorable outcome. When I found myself in difficult circumstances as an adult, I reflected on the lessons from my childhood. I

remembered that during these moments, I didn't have to suffer in silence. During the prayers of the people, I gave my worries and my situation over to God. We stood together, cried together and praised together the God who created us to be more than conquerors. Life's difficult circumstances provided for me and my congregation an invitation to meet with God front and center--together. It was an invitation not to journey alone, an invitation to an ongoing, dynamic experience of humanity connecting with God, an invitation to the beloved community."

Wow. Hear those words from Rev. Cyrus-Franklin again. An invitation to meet with God front and center--together. An invitation not to journey alone. An invitation to an ongoing, dynamic experience of humanity connecting with God. An invitation to the beloved community. Even when the world seems to spin out of our control.

Dearest SPC friends, I am so very grateful for all of you, and the way you all are an ongoing, dynamic experience of invitation to connect with God--especially in this time.

Tomorrow is Palm Sunday. It has always been my favorite Sunday in the church year. Theologically, of course, Easter and Good Friday and Christmas and Pentecost are at the center of everything I believe. But I love the way Palm Sunday is both joyful and defiant. I love the way it announces who Jesus is with the waving of palms and children processing and shouts of Hosanna--and also how it's a reminder that our Savior is one who embodies truth and justice against power and empire, and who speaks for the poor and forgotten. I love how Palm Sunday invites us into the journey of Holy Week--that it requires us to encounter the whole story, with all the pain and sorrow and confession--and yet still insists that we are an Easter people who live in the "already" of that good news. I love that Palm Sunday demands us to confront the hard truth of who we would have been in the story--and still says that even we, just as we are, can prepare the way of the Lord.

Friends, tomorrow, as we worship, I will be filled with gratitude knowing that we are, indeed, together--building the beloved community joyfully and defiantly. That none of us journeys alone. And that we meet with God front and center through it all.

O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good, for God's steadfast love endures forever. Hosanna!

Let us pray, using Rev. Cyrus-Franklin's prayer for us on this Fifth Saturday in Lent:

"Dear Lord, there are times when I feel so alone and troubled. Light my path and guide my feet, so that I may come to know and experience your loving grace through your beloved community. Amen."