

Palm Sunday 2024

Jesus passes by, carrying his Cross. The Passion we just heard is not only a record of a past event, real though it was; it is the pattern of Christian life and the key to the entirety of history. “Whatever you do to the least, you do to me,” Jesus said. ***In our sufferings and troubles, and those of every person, we can see Jesus pass by, carrying his Cross – not for Himself but for our freedom and our hope.***

Mark’s record of the Passion contains one element none of the other Gospels record: the young man following Jesus, wearing only a linen cloth which he leaves behind, fleeing in fear for his life. It’s a strange detail, and tradition has offered various ideas of who he was: Mark himself, or Joseph of Arimathea, or James or John, or some unnamed disciple. The Greek noun used here suggests he was a young adult, in his late teens or early twenties. But the linen cloth is perhaps more important. The Greek word used is ***sindon***, or shroud. Mark uses the same words when the women come to the empty tomb; they find a young man seated there clothed in a linen cloth – that is, in a sindon. This cloth is a symbol of redemption, of a new beginning, the same new life we are given by being Baptized into Christ’s death. He was a follower who was stripped of courage and hope and self-reliance by the Passion; he is now given new strength and made a herald of Resurrection. ***The fearful and fleeing one becomes the messenger of calm presence and Good News.*** The burial cloth is transformed into the Baptismal garment, as death gives way to life.

As we celebrate Holy Week, the world goes on. The tragedies we see all too often in the news and the problems in our lives loom large, and the words of Jesus resound in our hearts: ***“All of you will have your faith shaken.”***

But even if we flee, God’s love and mercy can reach us and change us, clothing us too in strength and courage. Perhaps Lent did not go quite you planned on Ash Wednesday, but it has still led us here, to be clothed in hope and reassurance. Because Jesus did NOT come down from the Cross, we understand what God’s love looks like, and believe.