

Sermon, March 16, 2008 Palm Sunday
 Calvary Episcopal Church, Underhill, VT
 Readings:

Liturgy of the Palms

Matthew 21:1-11

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

The Passion Gospel

Matthew 26:14-27:66 (or Matthew 27:11-54)

Something I thought I would *never* own is a treadmill. Never say “never.” I know plenty of folks who own one and I’m quick to ask them how long it took before their treadmill was converted into a coat, shirt or pants rack, or a clothes drying rack; you know, the thing you hang your delicate-hand washable items on rather than over the shower curtain rod? I take some consolation in the truth that I did not go out and purchase our treadmill. We inherited it.

My priest colleague and spiritual brother, priest of the parish neighboring my most recent-past parish, purchased the thing. Announcing he had no plans to move it, (was leaving it behind as he prepared to move), we hauled it home, hauled it here, and it has sat in the enclosed back porch of our little rental house for some 9 months now, without a foot treading upon it. I hung a coat on it one day, and said a prayer of reconciliation that I’d be forgiven for all the tongue-in-cheek remarks I made to other well meaning and potential exercisers who lay their robes on their treadmills, blocking the pathway to better health.

Truth be said, our treadmill would not work after its long haul here. “Its not getting power to its motor,” I told Marcie, “perhaps it’s the fuse.” I removed the fuse, studied it carefully, set it down, and let a couple of months go by. Perhaps expecting a miracle. After a recent trip across town to the Sears Repair and Parts Store a few weeks ago, the fuse was ordered. I forget why we waited so long to get one. Although the fuse was delivered through the mail, the delivery fee cost more than the fuse. Go figure.

“I have the fuse,” I announced arriving home from the post office one afternoon a few days ago. Within minutes we were on our hands and knees trying to remember where it was supposed to fit. “There, it fits,” I said, attaching the fuse to the only loose wires I could find, “plug it in and let’s see what happens.” “You’re a genius,” Marcie declared, “it works!” “Blast,” I thought to myself, “it works.”

A couple of hours of shuffling “back porch stuff” around and Marcie had set our “walking shoes” next to the “rare-‘n to go” treadmill.

“We have a nice view of the back yard, don’t have to dodge traffic, there’s no need to bundle up, and we could both use the exercise,” she said, with great enthusiasm. “Yes, you’re right,” I replied, noticing there are already hooks on the walls of the porch to hang plenty of coats and shirts and pants on.

So, one afternoon this past week, I stepped into and laced up my walking shoes, set my trusty mount’s speed on “minimum” and began walking...to nowhere. My mind went back about 12 years ago, when I kept a membership at a health club. There I was in the proper exercise clothes, real running shoes, about 20 pounds lighter, pushing up the

speed (way beyond minimum) to keep up with the other fit people there. Some listening to music through a headset, some reading a book propped in front of them, some watching a bank of televisions hanging from the ceiling; CNN, stock market reports, Oprah, As the World Turns.

About 3 minutes into my “walk to nowhere” I thought, “this is too boring,” stopped the thing, got off and went looking for a book. I grabbed my BCP, remounted the thing, re-set its speed to “minimum” and opened my prayer book to page 585: Psalm 1. It read, “*Happy are they who have **not** walked in the counsel of the wicked,* nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats of the scornful!*” It reminded me that we all have been on a walk these past few weeks.

We have been walking with Jesus: in and around the “counsel of the wicked” (those plotting against him). He has led us into the “way of sinners’ and non-believers where he taught, and healed, and preached, and resurrected, but we did not linger; he gave his message and moved us on. We celebrated his birth, witnessed his baptism, his Transfiguration, became his followers; all the while others along the way scorned him, held him and us in contempt, sneered at him. We promised to follow. He set his face on Jerusalem, dragged us along with him, we have seen some powerful stuff.

Just this morning we followed him triumphantly into Jerusalem shouting and singing, “*Hosanna in the Highest; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,*” only to suddenly blend into the crowd, and for our own safety’s sake we shouted with the others, “*LET HIM BE CRUCIFIED...CRUCIFY HIM!!!!*” How could we...how could we? How could we so quickly turn and “walk with those who plotted against him, linger among those who do his teachings harm, sit among those who mock him...even deny we know him, let alone follow him? How could we?

“So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing to change their minds and that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands (of the whole thing) before the crowd. “I had nothing to do with this, see to his death yourselves, I am innocent of his blood.” “His blood be on us and our children!” they shouted back.

On the night before he was handed over to death, Jesus, at supper with his friends took the cup of wine and said, “drink this, all of you, this is my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant which will be shed for you, when you drink it remember me.”

“They spat on him, and struck him on the head.” The thorns in the crown they fashioned for him caused him to bleed. “After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.”

So, we are on the road with Jesus again, and it's **not** leading to nowhere after-all. What he was telling us all along is true after-all. He **was** handed over, and **he is** dragging a cross, (his cross), along the road to the hill shaped like a skull where they crucify criminals for all to see.

“Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats of the scornful.*

Happy are they....who walk away.