

Against Passion Sunday

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I am thinking of starting a campaign to bring back Palm Sunday, without the additional observance of Passion Sunday. Palm Sunday was always one of my favorites growing up as a preacher's kid, and it was all about the palms--and a lot of them. It was celebratory, festive, when as child I got a chance for a hands-on worship experience and a glimpse of what royalty could look like.

I understand the practical reasons for the more recent liturgical emphasis on the day's dual themes: most people won't be coming back during the week, so they need to hear the crucifixion story now. The church needs to make sure that the story of Jesus' death is given its due before acknowledging any reports of resurrection appearances.

But are such practical concerns rationale enough for downplaying the Palm Sunday experience of faith? What is Passion Sunday's *theological* raison d'être? Should we really try to hold the palms and the passion together in a single service? Even between Good Friday and Easter Sunday we get a day to move between sorrow and joy, between suffering and glory, between death and life.

I wonder if we need Palm Sunday's moments of praise for what they are, not what they will be in a few days. A celebration of Palm Sunday alone might bring back a pattern of faith that we need: the moments of pain, of suffering, of the victory of the world, are bracketed by hosannas and alleluias, by glory, laud and honor. It's a structure of belief that is inherent in the Gospel story.

Palm Sunday can give us language to express "God with us." The crowd gets it: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" The one at the center of this parade of palms is none other than Immanuel. Hosanna indeed.