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 Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria Virginia

Do you ever wonder how you are supposed to feel today? To me, the morning feels like a rollercoaster -- but upside down. By that, I mean that on Palm Sunday we don't get on at the bottom and chug our way up. We step on at the top cheering and waving our palms. Then the passion narrative takes us on an emotional plunge straight into the tunnel of Holy Week.

But starting at the top where we do, it's really kind of cool because we connect with ancient traditions. Back in Jesus's day, all rulers were treated to this pomp and circumstance of palm waving as they entered Jerusalem. Of course, their physical placement, in high chariots or on horseback, mirrored their social placement. Jesus was also greeted with palms but he did something different. He came in on a short-legged colt whose stature was so low that Jesus was eye-level with the people as he rode along. And children, considered to be among the lowly of society, were there cheering him on. Jesus would have it no other way for he was always in solidarity with the people. While he was fulfilling the prophecy of Scripture, I wonder, was he also making a parody of the presumed powers of the world? Were the others, even the children, knowingly participating in this? If that's true, then what does that mean for us when we wave our palms on this Sunday? Are we part of the parody? Christians have been waving their palms since the faith was legalized.

In the year 380, a nun* from Europe visiting Jerusalem wrote in her diary:

At one in the afternoon all went to the Mount of Olives and hymns, anthems, and lessons were recited. At 5pm they heard the story of how children carrying olive branches and palms met Jesus saying, "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord". And all went back into the city shouting "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord". And all the children of the neighborhood, even those who are too young to walk, are carried by their parents on their shoulders, all of them bearing branches, some of palms and some of olives, and thus the bishop is escorted in the same manner as the Lord was of old.

All through the centuries, and still today, we wave our palms before Easter for a reason: to celebrate Christ as our true and only king. But in that same action, we are also stating that the powers on earth have no power over us. Our waves are a victorious Yes to Jesus, and No to earthly powers that work against God.

Two Saturdays ago I went to perform a home blessing for a Grace young adult who was moving into her first apartment. Her family was there along with a number of friends. I proceeded with the invocation that begins "Let the mighty power of the Holy God be present in this place to banish from it every unclean spirit..." and her sister, with perfect comic timing, stood up and said "Well I guess I'll be leaving now." We all cracked up. Do you see that in her humor, Heather was waving her palms? We joined her when we laughed along. Before Jesus, people would never have made jokes about unclean spirits. They were way too scary. But now with Christ as king of our world, we wave our palms with a Yes to God and confidently even poke some fun at those we say no to.

We all love to celebrate and have fun, and there are so many reasons to do so. On our rollercoaster ride through Holy Week that starts and ends at great heights, it's easy to cover our eyes through the hard parts. We all know what's going to happen in the story, and we are already living in a post-Resurrection world. It's easy to just wait until Easter Day to come back to church. We will be cheering He is Risen and the nave will be

stunningly beautiful. But, everything in our liturgical year exists for a reason. We don't truly get to the heights without going through the low tunnel first.

For it is here we see a clash of divine and earthly kingdoms. Truth meeting lies. Non-violence meeting cruelty. We see the most fully innocent person punished with the worst death. If we uncover our eyes we can see this is us and this is our world still today. That is us on the cross. In our post-Resurrection world, so much is still wrong with the world that is not funny at all. There is still so much to be healed.

So it is in the tunnel of Holy Week that we ask ourselves, finally, for the last time in Lent, whose side are we truly on? The one who is in solidarity with us, or an earthly something else? As we chug our way up out of the tunnel on Saturday night, we may not have complete answers. But, at least, if we sense that we are pointing towards God in our lives, then we know we can arrive at Easter once again with renewed hope. With lives pointed towards God, we are waving our palms at the world with hope, not just today, but all year long.

*Egeria the Pilgrim