

March 29, 2015, Palm/Passion Sunday
Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church
Mark 11:1-11; Mark 15:1-39

Gown & Crown

He arrived with acclamation. People placed garments on the ground, laying the clothing down in homage, honoring Jesus as descendant of the great King David. Just days later, acclaim turned to accusation. He was asked: “Was he the King of the Jews?” He was clothed with irony, clad in a garment of purple, the color of royalty. He wore an ironic crown, one made of thorns.

And then the garment was torn off. He was stripped of his clothing and led out of the city, nailed to a cross and crowned with a sign: “The King of the Jews.” Around him, uncrowned heads were shaking, asking, “What kind of King is this?” He breathed his last and another garment tore—the garment that was the curtain of the Temple, a tearing like that at his baptism, when the garment of the sky was torn apart, and a voice from heaven said, “You are my beloved Son.” Now at his death, another tearing, and another voice, “Truly this man was God’s Son.”

There was one more garment: a linen garment, the one they wrapped his body in, when they laid him in the tomb, a linen garment, fresh and white—like the garments of baptism.

We had two baptisms at the 8:30 service this morning: Lilliana, a darling one year old—in fact she is exactly one year old today, this day of her baptism is also her birthday. Along with Lilliana, there was her 11 year old brother, Calvin, who has been thinking about faith, and wanted to be baptized today, too. What joy this brings to their families, their parents, and grandparents and godparents, and to us. There is so much joy at a service with a baptism, as the baptized are surrounded by family and friends and the goodwill of the congregation. There is so much life and hope at a service with a baptism, and today it is juxtaposed with the passion, with the story of Jesus’ suffering and death.

And yet, as the apostle Paul reminds us, these two: baptism and the Passion, are not so oddly paired. As St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” In our baptisms we wear that last garment that was wrapped around Jesus. In our baptisms, we are all wrapped in a linen shroud, as we acknowledge the sin and the suffering that is so much a part of life, and death. There is no avoiding it, not with a sprinkling of water. Just as Jesus’ own baptism did not preclude the pain of the cross, these baptisms today do not mean these children will not encounter pain in their own lives—painful as it is to say. As a pastor, I need to say that. As a parent, how I wish it weren’t true, how I wish there were something we could do to prevent our children from suffering. There are few things more painful to than to know they will, seeing them as they do. On Good Friday, God the Father suffered with God the Son.

This Christian faith that we confess does not pretend that baptism prevents suffering. Rather, we believe, we confess, we come to worship today, especially on this sacred day, because baptism invites us, and prepares us, for a life that goes beyond suffering and death. As baptized people, we walk in a different way, we talk in a different way, we have a different bearing, as if we are wearing royal garment of God’s beloved children. In baptism, after being washed with God’s forgiving and life-giving water, we receive a crown. Our heads are anointed with oil, that ancient symbol of royalty, and it is traced in the sign of the cross. For, as the apostle Paul continues, in that same passage from Romans: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into his death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”