Jesus’ Tearful Entry

‘Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem,’
The heading says above today’s readings in my Bible.
And immediately, images come to my mind:
Masses of people clutching their palm fronds,
Shouts of “Hosanna!”
And Jesus, a humble smile on his face, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

These are the images we’ve inherited from art, film, and Scripture.

Today, at the very beginning of service, we heard St. Luke’s version of this “triumphal entry.”
Perhaps it slipped by you (I admit it’s a hard moment to focus on anything but your palm frond
and the fun of a procession),
But as Luke tells the story, there are no palms,
Only cloaks laid down in the road.
There are no shouts of “hosanna!”
Luke is the only Gospel writer to leave these iconic details out.

But he’s also the only writer to include this one, small note at the end of the victorious
procession:
“As he came near and saw [Jerusalem], he wept over it” (Luke 19:41).
Don’t worry if you didn’t hear or see that verse today.
It actually wasn’t included in the reading appointed for today.
It’s just one verse after.

St. Luke tells us that “as he came near and saw the city, he wept over it”
This is what lies at the end of Jesus’ “triumphal entry”?
Really?
After all the movement and all the praising,
After all the anticipation…Jesus weeps?

He does.
We can only imagine his emotions in that moment.
His entire ministry had led to that spot.
He knew full well what lay ahead for him:
How the shouts of praise would soon deform into the howls of an angry mob,
How his friends would fall asleep and betray him,
How he’d be abandoned at the very end of his earthly journey.
He also knew what would come after that:
The women anointing his crucified body,
The shock and scandal of the empty tomb,
And the confusion of his disciples upon seeing him again off the cross.

And Jesus probably wasn’t just crying for himself.
He was crying for all the violence that city would make and hold over the next week,
And the dissension that that region still continues to hold today.
He was weeping over the brokenness of the whole world.

Maybe you don’t consider yourself a “crier,”
But we’ve all shed tears.
We cry from sadness and disappointment:
When a sibling, or friend, or spouse lets us down one more time.
When we realize the hopes and plans we’d made would most certainly not come true.
We’ve wept from joy:
When dreams were realized.
When we got the job, or our diagnosis was cleared.
We’ve shed tears from sheer exhaustion:
From the piling up of responsibilities and tasks, combined with lack of sleep…
It can bring us to our breaking points.
For all these things and more, Jesus wept that day.

And, since we just heard the rest of the Passion story,
We know the tears will only continue.
Peter will break down crying after he hears the cock crow a third time (Luke 22:62).
Bitter, bitter tears as he realizes how deeply he’s let himself and his teacher down.
Tears of disappointment that he has -- after so much hopeful anticipation -- completely failed.

The unnamed women – the “daughters of Jerusalem” - will weep and cry out as they watch Jesus be taken to the cross (Luke 23:28).
Jesus will, in his way, try to comfort them, telling them not to weep for him,
But to cry for themselves and their children.

The tears -- of disappointment, exhaustion, and grief, and even joy -- will remain with us.

This – Palm Sunday - is an exhausting day in the church.
It’s a joyful day. It’s a sad and disappointing day.

As we stand at the beginning of the holiest of weeks in the year,
We may weep at the sheer volume of it all.
And as we weep, we weep with Jesus.

This week I read a reflection from The Rev. Mike Marsh that I wanted to share with you as we prepare for the days ahead. He said:
“Whatever your tears and weeping may be about,
let them become your entry into Holy Week.
To push back our tears or to wipe them away is to deny ourselves the power of this Holy Week, and the joy of Easter life. Let this Holy Week transform your tears into the holy waters of baptism; waters of cleansing and release, waters of forgiveness and healing, waters of rebirth and new life."

May we follow the well-worn path of tears into Jerusalem, And there may our faithful Holy Week journey begin. Amen.

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1 https://interruptingthesilence.com/2016/03/21/the-tearful-entry-into-holy-week-a-palm-sunday-sermon-on-luke-1928-46/