

Palm Sunday – the first day of Holy Week. I might call this whiplash Sunday if it were up to me. The festival portion of the day includes the reading of the story in Mark's Gospel of the triumphal entry of Jesus into the Holy City. Then almost directly after that we have the solemn and tragic part of our morning when the Passion narrative is read, also from the Gospel of Mark this year and we mourn the terrible arrest, trial and death of Jesus.

It is thought that there was about a week's time between when Jesus entered Jerusalem and when his arrest and trial took place. We call that time Holy Week. Jesus spent the nights staying nearby in Bethany and was found in the city every day teaching and talking to the crowds and verbally sparring with the learned leaders of the Jewish faith, the Scribes and Pharisees.

Mark's Gospel tells us is that during this time, leaders of the Jews were seeking to find a way to arrest Jesus quietly. They knew they had to get him out of the way. He was a troublemaker. And they knew that he was adored by the crowds. They respected him as rabbi, a religious leader. He had to go. But they couldn't arrest him openly. The crowds would raise a fuss, perhaps even a riot, and that would draw too much attention and risk Roman intervention. So Judas tipped off the religious leaders and told them that at night Jesus could be found in the garden of olive trees across the valley from the Temple, in Gethsemane.

Frankly, this is all too much for one Sunday. But there is a theme that can pull it all together for us, the theme of threshold time. It could be called liminal time or in between time. I was thinking about this as I wrote my Easter Letter to you that you may have read in last week's Trinity Update. The idea is from Esther de Waal's book *To Pause at the Threshold*.¹

When we are at the threshold of a new place, a special place, a holy place we are apt to pause for a moment. If we can, and look around, take it all in. Sometimes that isn't possible. If people are crowding in behind you, or if someone is greeting you and urging you forward, you may not have the opportunity to just drink in where you are; thinking back...looking ahead.

What if we were with Jesus, outside of the walls of the city of Jerusalem, near one of the large imposing gates, and waiting with him and other followers for those disciples to return with the donkey to ride into the old city teeming with bustling crowds. There would have been a lot of anticipation, perhaps joy tempered with anxiety about what dangers lay in store for Jesus in the city, the beating heart of the Jewish faith.

That's the first threshold that is crossed in our scripture today. I'm sure there are many we could identify in our passages from Mark today. I'll pick two more important ones:

There is the deadly threshold to cross, when Jesus is at prayer at night and he is arrested in the Garden and taken back to the Old Walled City but this time bound and escorted by men holding swords and clubs. There was no possibility of pausing at the gate this time. There was no opportunity for reflection on what crossing this threshold would mean. But it became clear quite soon. Jesus would not leave this place alive... this time.

The first threshold had been one of hopeful anticipation. Who would Jesus encounter and what discussions and prayers would he share with the people of the city? The second threshold was one of danger and dread.

The last threshold to be crossed by our Lord Jesus in the scripture today was that from life to death. As Jesus hung on the cross, we receive different messages from the Gospel writers about what occurred in that liminal time. People taunted Jesus and shouted at him. Jesus himself spoke words of faith and of forgiveness, he spoke words of the triumph of God's plan for him. And ultimately, after suffering there in the border lands, he crossed the threshold, died and was buried in the tomb provided by Joseph of Arimathea.

I invite you today to take stock as you stand on the threshold of this time in your life. I invite you to look down at your feet. Can you see the threshold you are standing on? Can you take the time to just stay there a little while. Think about what has passed; what you are walking from. Look towards what lies ahead. And give thanks for being where you are right now before rushing headlong into the next thing. And lastly, let us pray for the Spirit to stand there with us, you and me, and walk with us as we step out into the next adventure God has for us.

ⁱ Esther de Waal, *To Pause at the Threshold*, Morehouse Press, 2001.