

**A Sermon for the Sixth Sunday in Lent, April 5, 2009**  
**Commonly Called Palm Sunday**  
*The Rev. Stephen C. Scarlett*

The expectant, jubilant crowd becomes the disappointed, angry crowd. This is the essence of the Palm Sunday liturgy. We know the story. Jesus didn't do what the people expected him to do, so the people turned on him.

What's worse, in Matthew's account of the ordeal, is that Jesus gave no explanation. Pilate said to Jesus, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" "But," Matthew tells us, "He answered him not one word so that the governor marveled greatly" (27:13).

As the prophet Isaiah wrote, "He was oppressed and afflicted, Yet he opened not his mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So he opened not his mouth" (53:7).

This is a pattern for the Christian life as we grow beyond spiritual infancy. We welcome Jesus into our lives with great joy and anticipation. But, inevitably, there comes a time when Jesus does not do what we expect. Rather than answered prayers we get the cross and silence.

This happens because God gives us the good we need instead of the good we want and expect. Jesus himself got the good the Father had planned for him and not the good he wanted. He prayed, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." His prayer was also answered with silence.

We are a little bit afraid of the second part of Jesus' prayer, "Nevertheless, not my will, but Thy will be done." And yet our struggle and discontent results precisely from our contrary desire, "Not Thy will, but my will be done."

If I insist on "my will" instead of "Thy will" I may get dozens of temporal victories and pleasures, but I cannot get forgiveness, the conquest of death and the promise of resurrection. When I insist on "my will," my pain leads to disappointment. When I accept "Thy will," my pain leads to Easter.

Our faulty expectations are usually centered on external things. If only God will change this or that part of my life, then I will be fulfilled. Jesus focuses on internal things—the sin that is in our hearts. We want to change circumstances. Jesus wants to change us.

Instead of instituting regime change, Jesus marched into Jerusalem to die for our sins. This suggests that our sins, and not the current regime, are the main problem. This suggests that the revolution must begin, not with the problems we see when we look out the window, but with the problems we see when we look in the mirror.

God will change the external things in his good time. But now he is changing us. Jesus will come again in glory to judge the world, raise the dead and make all things new. Now he gives us our share of the cross. Jesus will give us the good we want and expect, but first he gives us the good we need.