

We started out alright.
We celebrated Jesus on his way into town.
We were so excited
that some of us even shouted out loud.
“Hosanna in the Highest!
Glory to God!”
We came for a parade, a party.
We shouted Hosanna
to the one who would bring us glory.

But it didn't take long
before we shouted, “crucify him.”
He got into town,
and then he started flipping over tables
and telling us that church isn't easy.
He got into town,
and even if you weren't paying attention,
you figured out pretty quickly that, for Jesus,
greatness was never the aim.

He promised us the kingdom.
But we figured out
that his kingdom wasn't about power,
and we discovered
that about the only way to open the gates of that kingdom
was to knock them down
with a cross that you've been carrying.

When we figured all that out,
we killed him.

“Jesus save me!”

If you’re like me, you may not say those exact words,
but we’ve all said it before:

“Help me out here God!”

We’ve all said it:

“Jesus save me!”

But not from anything too hard.

Not from anything where I have to change too much.

A couple of weeks ago

I attended a service at Warren Temple United Methodist Church.

This was the second of these services,
focused on the acknowledgment of
and repentance for

the lynchings that took place in LaGrange and Troup County
during Jim Crow servitude.

Most of you know that the police chief and others

offered that word of repentance at the service back in January.

During this service in March,
I was struck most of all by the words of Greg Brown
of Western Heights Baptist Church.
People from his church had participated,
in ways large and small,
in a lynching in the 1940's.

He stood before the descendants of those victims
and offered his word of repentance.

Through the course of what he had to say
he asked one important question:

“What kind of a people?”

What kind of a people
go to church on Sunday,
hearing the Word of God,
and then go out from there
to commit violence against the least among us?

What kind of a people
pretend that the color of someone's skin
could ever be reason enough to murder them?

What kind of a people were we,
our fathers and our grandfathers?
What kind of a people were we?

What kind of a people are ***we***?

It is a question made for Palm Sunday.

What kind of a people were they?

People who were in the processional one moment
and the next were shouting, "crucify him!"

What kind of a people were they?

What kind of a people can move so quickly
from adoration to rage?

What kind of a people sell their values,
30 pieces of silver at time?

What kind of a people look for greatness
and shout Hosanna?

What kind of a people shout, "crucify him"

What kind of a people nail a man to a cross
and leave him for dead?

What kind of a people?

When I heard Greg speak at Warren Temple,
he told us that just that morning,

someone had asked him,

"Why do we need to bring up something 70 years old?

Can't we just let the past sit in the past?"

He responded kindly,

but reminded this person that the past is our heritage.

We must pray over our past

the same as we pray over our beloved dead,

not so that the past can be changed,

but so that we can move into the future.

Why tell a story 70 years old?

Why tell a story 2000 years old?

Are they really all that far in the past?

Aren't they OUR stories?

Don't we jump from Alleluia to damnation and back again,
fast enough to make your stomach turn?

Don't we have an obligation,
every day
to answer that same question,

“What kind of a people are we?”