

The Great Vigil of Easter
April 11, 2009
Trinity Cathedral
Catherine Nichols

Yellow for JOY
Something we can get nowhere else!

The Rev. Bill Tully, rector of St. Bartholomew's in New York City,
wrote this week:

Holy Week gives you something the world cannot give you.

Yes, we know the story.

We can talk it – maybe we can even recite it.

But walking it gives us something we can get nowhere else.

Since last Sunday we have been walking through Holy Week.

And it is a hard journey.

To quote poet T.S. Eliot writing about another journey:

A cold coming we had of it,

Just the worst time of the year

For a journey, and such a long journey:...

And such a long journey.

In The Evangelist John's version of The Passion Narrative

chanted by men from our choir

both last Sunday, The Sunday of the Passion,

and at The Good Friday liturgy,

Pilate presents Jesus to the chief priests

and the temple leaders
who are insisting that he be killed.

“Crucify him, crucify him!” they shout.

“Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asks them.

And the chief priests answer,

“We have no king but Caesar.”

The Temple leaders, the influential Jews in Jerusalem,
are fawning upon The Imperial Government:

“We have no king but Caesar.”

I see those so-called leaders enveloped in a yellow cloud:
chicken yellow; angry yellow; wimpy yellow; scared yellow.

They have become an unruly yellow mob,
calling for the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

A fickle, cowardly, fearful and therefore angry, yellow mob.

Friends, we are part of that yellow mob.

Remember just a week ago,
when we began the journey of Holy Week on Palm Sunday,
we began with high hopes? We were a joyous, hopeful mob.

We greeted Jesus as royalty, strewing palms and coats

in his path as he entered Jerusalem, The Holy City.

We had hoped that he would overthrow
the oppressive Roman government,
that he would lead us to new glories
of freedom and prosperity. But he led us to God's realm,
a place where the powerless are the most important,
where freedom is responsibility
and prosperity is not material.

Our fickle yellow reaction:

“Crucify the guy!”

Our journey through Holy Week,

a cold coming of it,

has been a painful journey of betrayal, of blood,
of thorns, of nails and a cross, of the darkness of death.

But this evening the yellow dross of fear and weakness

which went black yesterday

and remained all day today, Holy Saturday,

black at the emptiness of Jesus dead, gone. ---

that yellow dross has been transformed from the darkness of death

into the bright yellow of the Holy Fire.

The Paschal Candle, symbol of Christ the light, symbol of new life,
burns brightly yellow.

We lit our candles from The Easter Candle.

Fearful fickle yellow

was transformed into the golden-yellow glow of victory.

The golden-yellow glow lit our faces as we gathered in this holy place
to finish the journey of Holy Week.

And the journey ended at the OPEN tomb.

I like to imagine the early morning tomb scene.

Dawn points in greys tinged with black.

In Mark's version read tonight three women
approach the tomb, the dark place of death,
wondering how they will get in to anoint Jesus' body,
for the stone in front of the cave was large.

Imagine their surprise, and their fear,
when they see the stone rolled aside.

More yellow fear.

I like to imagine that Angel of the Lord,

the “young man sitting” there in the tomb
to be white and radiant,
in brilliant contrast to the grim grey tomb
and the women’s yellow fear.

He surprises them by telling them Jesus is not there,
that he is risen, and that they are to go tell the disciples
that they will see him in Galilee.

The tomb in my mind’s eye then becomes suffused in yellow,
the yellow of fear. The fearful yellow remains:
in the Marcan version the women flee and tell no one.

We hear this version with no horror,
for we have read the other accounts.

We know Jesus will appear in multiple places
to many of his friends.

This is the wondrous Good News we proclaim this Easter Eve:

We do not have to exist in a yellow shroud of fear.

For Christ lives!

Christ has offered us salvation by his blood:

his blood IS on us and on our children,

a salvific gift, a gift of everlasting life!

It is into this good news that you have been baptized, Melissa Hanley.

Tonight, the night of your baptism, is your Golden Night:

the gold of the bright paschal fire,

the sweet gold of the candles we held as we heard Pam

tell our beloved stories of God acting through history,

through creation -- "and it was good"

through freedom from bondage at the Red Sea,

through the vision of wholeness: -- "those dry bones shall live!"

This is your Golden Night: bright, shining yellow.

The color yellow lies in the midst of the spectrum of colors.

When we behold a rainbow

yellow is gentle, subtle, almost a lesser band,

a narrow band compared to the others in the spectrum.

Yellow is a spring band of delicate brightness.

Friday, as we left the church after the sober Good Friday service,

the dark clouds which had painted the sky grey all day

had parted, and patches of blue showed.

The soft yellow light of the late-afternoon sun had broken through.

Late-afternoon sun in spring is gentle.

In summer it's not gentle: it's bright yellow, less subtle.

In winter late-afternoon sun is of darker texture,
a grey-yellow light.

But spring in Oregon treats us to the delicate narrow band
between the dark colors of afternoons during our long, grey winter,
and the almost-too-vivid colors of late afternoon light
during our bright summer.

After this just-passed particularly cold, snowy, gray winter
that seemed to last and last,
we are panting for spring yellow, are we not?

There it was on the afternoon of *Good Friday*.

And tonight, here in darkness,
we are once again wrapped in soft, joyous yellow.

On color symbolism charts
the color yellow stands for sun, light, air, royalty.

The SUN: we consider God's Son
to be central to our theological solar system.

Christ is our SUN.

We focus our lives around Christ the Sun.

In Him we live and move and have our being.

Through her baptism Melissa has committed herself to Christ the Sun.

LIGHT: Jesus tells us he is the light of the world.

People who have had mystical experiences of Christ describe him as wrapped in soft yellow light.

Many who have had out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, have also described bright, warm light.

Jesus' message of mercy and justice

lightens our dark world with the brilliance of love.

Melissa, I do anticipate that your new life in Christ will be brighter as we, your brothers and sisters in Christ, welcome you into this your church family.

Yellow is also associated with AIR:

our lives in Christ are lived in the fresh air of truth, not in the dark, cold tomb of fear or dishonesty.

Christ is the very air we breathe.

And yellow is associated with ROYALTY.

Last week, Palm Sunday, or just yesterday, Good Friday,

we heard the fickle-yellow crowd chant

“Crucify the man who would be king!”

And today we celebrate that he is, indeed, king,

but not in the way we expected.

His royal yellow began as hay in a lowly stable,

as the golden glow of Mary’s loving look.

His royal yellow developed into the ever-brighter yellow

of Jesus teaching the Kingdom of God.

And it became the brilliant yellow of total submission,

submission to death.

Christ’s royalty is the paradoxical royalty of servanthood.

And it glows gold, brilliant gold,

the value of which cannot be measured,

what we call “inestimable benefits.”

Tonight, through her baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection,

Melissa takes on yellow: Yellow for Jesus, our Sun.

Yellow for Jesus, the Light of the World.

Yellow for Jesus, who is royalty, a king,

but one different from any other king before or ever since.

This Holy Night, the end of our hard journey,

will always shine golden for Melissa.

For tonight, with all of us as witnesses and supporters,

Melissa has joined the worldwide family of Christ.

She has become part of this, her congregation.

Holy Week gives you something the world cannot give you.

Yes, we know the story.

We can talk it – maybe we can even recite it.

But walking it gives us something we can get nowhere else.

We have concluded the walk.

And we've been given what we can get nowhere else:

new life through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

Another Golden Year begins.

Tully quote from Barbara Crafton, "The Almost Daily eMo from Geranium Farm", Friday, April 20, 2009

'A Cold Coming...' from *Journey of the Magi*, T S Eliot

'Dawn points', T S Eliot, *East Coker*